

The Sealed Finding

Andries J. Greyling

Foreword

In January 1956, in a pulp magazine that paid by the word, Philip K. Dick published a story about a police bureau that arrested people for murders they had not yet committed. He gave it three oracles, because in 1956 there was no other way to know the future, and he gave it a commissioner who was proud of his low murder rate and frightened of his young deputy, and then he did the thing that makes it a great story rather than a clever one: he pointed out that the bureau could never be tested. If you stop the killing, you have destroyed the only evidence that it was going to happen. The system's success and its error look identical from the outside, forever, by design.

Then he found a second floor to fall through. The three oracles did not vote. They reported in sequence, and each one was answering a slightly different question, because each was looking at a man who had read the report before it. There was never a majority. There were three futures belonging to three differently informed men, and all of them were correct.

The Sealed Finding is not that story. It does not retell it, borrow its people, or move its furniture into a new room. What it borrows is the machine underneath — the arcs, which the author of this edition was asked to keep in full, and has: the founder named by his own instrument; the successor he suspects for no reason; the flight through a net whose mesh he specified; the faction that wants the bureau dead and happens to be right; the report that would clear him, filed where he may not read it; the recursion; and the ending, in which he does the murder on purpose, with his eyes open, to keep the machine standing. Twenty-two of them are listed in this book's working papers and ticked off one at a time. The names here are ours. The country is ours. The Directorate, the Estate, the Readers and the statute are

ours, built to different specifications and a different law.

What this version does that the original could not is remove the miracle. Dick needed mutants in a tank. We do not. Everything the Directorate does in these pages could be procured, today, by a government with an ordinary budget and a bad decade behind it, and the frightening part is not that we might build such a thing. It is that the case for building it is *good*. A country that has buried enough people will listen to anyone who can show it a number going down.

So the book has one rule it will not break: it will not let you settle. The Directorate imprisons people who have done nothing, on evidence they are not permitted to see, most of them poor, for as long as the order is renewed, which is forever. The Directorate also works. Both of those are true on every page and the book refuses to arbitrate, because the argument this story exists to hold open is not a fair fight between good and evil. It is a fair fight, and that is the horror.

Arjuna Badger Press makes work this way on purpose, and says so on purpose. The house has written unlicensed homage before — a *Warhammer* 40,000 novel that claimed nothing it had no right to claim, and two other books after Dick that took his machine and never his text — and the rule is the same one again: take the engine, never the words; disclose the debt; do not pretend the idea was yours. You are holding a craft exercise that wants very badly to also be a real book. Whether it earns that is for you to decide, which is the only honest way it could be decided.

— Arjuna Badger Press

A note on the original. This book is a faithful modern homage to **Philip K. Dick's "The Minority Report"** (*Fantastic Universe*, January 1956), **published in honor of the original**. It is **not endorsed by, authorized by, or affiliated with** Philip K. Dick, his estate, his publishers, or the producers of any film adapted from his work; the novella, its characters, its devices, and its text remain their intellectual property. This edition is offered in tribute, takes the engine and never the text, and is **not for commercial release**.

Dedication

For everyone who has been told, by someone with a form and a lanyard, what kind of person they were going to turn out to be —
and for the ones still held on a paper they are not allowed to read,
whose innocence is on file, in a drawer, in a building that means well.

Prologue

Tuesday 3 November 2054 — 05:40

The thing Sergeant Refilwe Modise had learned in nine years of up-takes was to knock like a neighbour.

Not the flat of the hand, not the side of the fist. Four knuckles, three times, at the volume you would use for a woman coming to borrow a plug adaptor. Ninety per cent of them opened the door themselves. The other ten per cent had already run, and running was a different form and a longer morning.

Number 14 opened on the chain, and then all the way.

“Mr Nkuna? Tebogo Nkuna?”

“Ja.” He was in a Chiefs jersey two sizes too big and boxer shorts, and he had the face of a man who has been asleep for four hours and expects to be told about a leak. Thirty-four. Fitment centre on Monument Road; they had his shift roster in the packet. Behind him a passage light, a smell of Sunlight soap, a cat going the other way with the unhurried contempt of a cat.

“Sergeant Modise, Preventive Enforcement. This is Constable Steenkamp. May we come in? You’re not in trouble.”

That last part was true and it was the sentence that did all the work. She had watched clever officers skip it and spend forty minutes on a landing.

He stood back and they came in.

The card was laminated because the Directorate had learned early that paper shakes. She held it at chest height and read it the way it

was written, which was slowly.

“Mr Nkuna, in terms of section fourteen of the Preventive Enforcement Act, a finding has been made that you will cause the death of another person within the next six days. You have not committed an offence. You are not under arrest. No criminal record arises from this. You are being taken into preventive custody at Doringkop Preventive Estate, where you will be a resident and not a prisoner. You have twenty minutes to pack. You may make one telephone call now and further calls from the Estate this evening. You may take personal effects up to one bag. Do you understand what I have read to you?”

He said, “Sorry, what?”

She read it again. That was in the card too, at the bottom, in italics: *If asked, read again, at the same pace.*

The second time he heard the word *kill* and his whole body changed shape. He sat down on the arm of the couch. Steenkamp took a step to the left, out of the doorway, hands where they could be seen, weapon untouched — six months in and doing it properly, which was more than she could say for herself at six months.

“Who?” Nkuna said. “Who am I supposed to have—” He didn’t have a verb for it. Nobody ever did; the language hadn’t caught up. “Who?”

“The named person isn’t disclosed to you, sir. That’s for their protection and for yours.”

“How can I not know?”

“I know,” she said. “I’m sorry.”

She meant it, and she had learned not to say it more than once, because more than once turned it into a negotiation.

He asked whether it was a mistake. She said the finding had been made by two Readers who had concurred and that there was a review of the order every year. He asked whether he could speak to a lawyer. She said he could, and that he should, and gave him the number for the duty advocate on the back of the card, and did not say — because it was not her job, and because he would find out — that the duty advocate would apply, and the application would be heard, and the magistrate would renew.

He called his girlfriend. Modise turned away and looked at the wall while he did it, because that was decency, and there was a school photograph on the wall of a boy in a blazer who was not Nkuna and had his face, a brother maybe, and a certificate from a tyre-fitting course, framed.

“Nomvula. Nomvula, listen—” He got that far and stopped. He had had two minutes to work out how to say it and he could not. “They’re taking me. No. No, I didn’t. Nothing. I didn’t do anything.”

I didn’t do anything. Every single one of them said it, and every single one of them was telling the truth. That was the part they did not put on the poster.

He packed the wrong things. They all packed the wrong things: a phone charger and four shirts and no underwear, a soap dish, a Bible, a bag of oranges off the counter. Modise stood in the passage and let him. Twenty minutes was a number the Directorate had arrived at after a study; it was long enough to be dignified and short enough that the neighbours were still mostly asleep.

At eighteen minutes a woman came out of number 12 in a gown and stood with her arms folded, and did not ask anything, and watched. There was one on every landing. In some buildings they clapped.

They went down the stairs with Steenkamp carrying the bag, which the manual required and which Modise had argued against for years, because a man carrying his own bag is still a man.

In the car Nkuna sat behind the mesh and looked out at the R21, and the sun came up over the airport in that flat orange Highveld way that makes even a warehouse look like a promise.

“Sarge,” Steenkamp said, quietly, after Boksburg. “Can I ask you something.”

“You can ask.”

“Do you ever want to know? Afterwards.” He was twenty-three. He had his elbow on the window and his eyes on the road, and he was asking with the studied lightness of somebody who has been carrying it for a while. “Like — whether they would have.”

“They don’t tell us.”

"I know they don't tell us. I'm asking if you want to know."

She thought about how to say it and then said it the way it had been said to her, at induction, in a lecture room in Pretoria with a broken air conditioner, by a woman who had built the thing.

"Paragraph four," she said. "It's in the founding paper. If we do our job, there is no body, no docket, no confession, no trial. There's nothing to check. Not because they hid it — because we removed it. So we are never going to know, not about him, not about any of them, not ever." She indicated, changed lanes, settled. "And the day they can prove to you that one of us was right, Steenkamp, that means somebody let that one go. That's the only way the proof exists. So no. I don't want to know. I want to keep not knowing for another nine years and then retire."

Steenkamp thought about it. "That's a hell of a thing," he said.

"It's the shape of it," she said. "You can't have the one without the other. They tell you that on the first morning and everyone thinks it's a warning. It's not a warning, it's a description."

They stopped at the garage outside Delmas because the Estate would not process an intake before eight and because it was policy to feed them. Steenkamp bought three breakfast rolls and three coffees, and Nkuna sat on the low wall by the air pump with his bag between his feet and ate his, all of it, because he was thirty-four and it was six in the morning and he was hungry, and the body does not care what the paperwork says.

Modise stood a little way off with her coffee and watched the storm building out over the mielies, an hour away, coming in on schedule the way they did in November.

Behind her, on a wall of the garage shop, was the poster with the two children on the swings and the line underneath in blue: **NOBODY HAS TO DIE TONIGHT.**

It was true. That was the thing about it. Every year for nineteen years it had been true, and there were eleven thousand people out past the mielies who had never done anything, and both of those were the same fact wearing different clothes, and Sergeant Refilwe Modise finished her coffee, because it was twenty to eight, and put the cup in the bin, and went to fetch him.

Part One - The Warrant

DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTIVE ENFORCEMENT
FINDING OF ANTICIPATED HOMICIDE
REGISTRY GP/2054/11-0883-A

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
s.14(2)(a) Preventive Enforcement
FILED 04 Nov 2054 04:11

SUBJECT
ANTICIPATED VICTIM
WINDOW
PRIOR CONTACT

MOTAUNG, Josiah Thabo
GROBLER, Cornelius Johannes
06 days, expiring 24:00, 09 Nov 2054
None of record.

FINDING: The subject will cause the death of the named person by discharge of a
firearm, within the window, at or adjacent to a public gathering.
Intent formation: assessed complete.
READER'S NOTE: None.

Struben Street

Day One — Wednesday 4 November 2054

Piet had been on the door of the building since before there was a Directorate to guard, and he still asked for the card.

“Môre, Directeur.”

“Môre, Piet. How’s the knee.”

“Still there.” He turned the card over, looked at the photograph, looked at Motaung, and handed it back, the same four movements he had made every weekday morning for nineteen years and, before that, for eleven years when the sixth floor had been the Department of Public Works and the lifts had been worse. “They say rain.”

“They say rain every day this week.”

“Ja, but today they mean it.”

The lobby smelled of floor polish and the brown of 1974. There was a campaign poster by the lifts, the one with the two children on the swings, and under it in blue: NOBODY HAS TO DIE TONIGHT. Comms had wanted to retire it in the spring for something with more energy. Motaung had said no in a two-line email, which was the most decisive thing he had done that quarter.

The lift took a long time and he did not mind. It was twenty past five.

He was in the building before the building, most mornings, and he liked the corridor at that hour, the strip lights coming on in banks as he walked and the printers still asleep. Nineteen years and he could still feel the specific pleasure of an institution that existed because he had argued it into existing. Men who had never built anything

called this vanity. Men who had built something knew it was closer to a dog's pleasure in a familiar yard.

His office was not large. He had refused the corner one in 2038 and by now the refusal was folklore. Desk, two chairs, a window with a view of the Union Buildings' gardens if you stood up and leaned, a cabinet with the Act in it and every amendment, and a kettle that he was not supposed to have.

He put the kettle on and opened the bottom left drawer.

It was not a ritual. He would have said that flatly to anyone who asked, and nobody asked, because nobody knew. There was one docket in the drawer, in the old cardboard, the kind that had gone out of use before the Brownouts, and the reference was written on it in his own handwriting when his handwriting had been better: **CAS 447/11/2027 — KATLEHONG**. Inside were three affidavits, two of his own letters to magistrates, a photocopy of a protection order that had been granted and served and filed, and a photograph of a woman in a yellow top standing in front of a Toyota with her arms folded, laughing at whoever was holding the camera.

Beauty Ngobese had been twenty-nine. She had an opinion about her sister's boyfriend that she was not shy about, and a job at a call centre in Alberton she was going to leave, and on the Sunday she died she had been planning to go to a christening.

He had written to three magistrates. Twice each. He had the escalation, the means, the pattern and the dates; he had a man who had said in front of witnesses what he was going to do and when. Each of the three had told him, correctly, that no offence had been committed. The third one had been kind about it. He remembered the kindness better than the refusals.

He did not open the docket. He looked at it long enough for the kettle to boil, which was about as long as he ever looked at it, and then he shut the drawer and made his coffee.

At quarter to six the overnight board came up on his terminal.

GAUTENG — HOMICIDE, PREVIOUS 24H: 2.

Both outside the instrument. One was a hijacking on the R59 that had gone the way hijackings go, no prior relation, no pattern, nothing

any stack in the world could have carried; the other was a nineteen-year-old stabbed outside a tavern in Sebokeng by a man he had met forty minutes earlier. That was the thing the newspapers never got right and the Directorate had stopped trying to explain. They could not see the stranger. They could not see the sudden. What they could see, with a clarity that had taken twenty years of everyone's data to buy, was the slow kind: the kind that announces itself for months to everybody who lives in the house, and that the old law was obliged to wait for.

Two. In 2029, in a single Wednesday, this province had buried thirty-one.

He sat with that the way he sat with it every morning, and it was not a lie, and he had never once let himself enjoy it, which was a discipline he was quietly proud of and which was, he suspected, also a kind of enjoyment.

At six the day's findings distributed.

He read them himself. He had always read them himself. Deputies had told him for nineteen years that the Director did not need to read the daily distribution, that this was what the operations desk was for, and he had agreed with them and gone on reading it, because a man who signs the annual report on eleven thousand residents should be able to say he has seen every name go by.

Eleven that morning. He went down the list with his coffee.

A man in Vosloorus. A woman in Randfontein, which was rare enough that he stopped and read the summary twice. A man in Ivory Park with three previous protection orders against him, which was the shape the instrument was built for, and he felt the old flat satisfaction, and moved on.

The eighth entry was:

MOTAUNG, Josiah Thabo.

He read the next line before he read the name.

That was the part he would think about afterwards, at Doringkop, on a bench in the sun, for a long time. Not the shock. The four seconds before it, in which his eyes did what nineteen years had trained them to do and went straight to the fields that mattered, the way a doctor

reads a chart before he reads the patient, so that he took in the window and the victim and the confidence band as *data*, competently, with mild professional interest, before any part of him understood that the subject was himself.

DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTIVE ENFORCEMENT

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

FINDING OF ANTICIPATED HOMICIDE

s.14(2)(a) Preventive Enforcement

REGISTRY GP/2054/11-0883-A

FILED 04 Nov 2054 04:11

SUBJECT MOTAUNG, Josiah Thabo
 ANTICIPATED VICTIM GROBLER, Cornelius Johannes
 WINDOW 06 days, expiring 24:00, 09 Nov 2054
 PRIOR CONTACT None of record.

FINDING: The subject will cause the death of the named person by d
 firearm, within the window, at or adjacent to a public gathering.
 Intent formation: assessed complete.

READER'S NOTE: None.

Underneath the block, where the distribution printed the status of every entry, was the line that said whether the Republic had finished making up its mind:

STATUS Provisional - 1 of 3. Awaiting Readers B, C.

The kettle ticked as it cooled. Outside, a bakkie reversed somewhere down on Struben Street and its warning beeped eleven times and stopped.

He read it again.

He was aware of his hands first, which was interesting, and which he noted the way he noted everything. They were flat on the desk on either side of the terminal and they were not shaking and they were not going to. His mouth had gone completely dry between one line and the next.

Grobler, Cornelius Johannes.

He knew the name the way everyone in the building knew the name. The Federation's chairman. A retired general with a good tailor and a legal fund, who had been on the radio in March being courteous about the Directorate in a way that had cost them a week. Motaung had never met him. Had never been in a room with him, never shared

a platform, never taken a call, never been introduced at anything. He had a security note about the man in a folder somewhere, four paragraphs, unread since June.

PRIOR CONTACT: None of record.

Any officer in the building would have read that line as exculpatory. A layman would. Two strangers, no history, no grievance, no proximity: on the face of it the most innocent line on the page.

Motaung had written the guidance note in 2039 that said the opposite, and it was still the guidance note. Absence of contact was not absence of relation. The stack did not need two people to have met. It needed one of them to be moving, at speed, along a line that ended at the other, and it could see the line long before the people on it could see each other. *No prior contact* meant the machine had found something it did not need a history to find. It was the least reassuring line in the packet and he had taught four intakes of officers to read it that way.

He looked at the timestamp. Filed 04:11. Reader A.

Grace Sithole had signed it. Nineteen years, eleven thousand files, and he could not have picked her out of a queue at a Spar, because that was the arrangement, and he had made the arrangement.

At six-forty there was a knock.

“Director?”

Ayesha Cassim put her head round the door with the memo already in her hand, and her lanyard on straight, and the specific composure of a woman who has been at her desk since five-thirty and is not going to mention it. Eleven weeks. The review committee had sent her, which was the whole trouble with her, and she had been nothing but courteous since the day she arrived, which was the rest of it.

“Morning. Have you got four minutes before the standing?”

He had not moved. He was conscious of that.

“Go ahead.”

“The seal note.” She came in one step, not further, which was her way. “I’ve redrafted it. I’m not asking you to sign anything, I’m asking you to disagree with me before I circulate it, so that when I say I ran

it past you it's true." A small tilt of her head. "It'll come up in the standing anyway. I'd rather you heard it from me sitting down."

Three years past the review. The committee had extended him twice. When they sent you a deputy in the eleventh week of a financial year they were not sending you help.

"Circulate it," he said.

She paused. It was not the answer she had come for, and she was too good to pretend otherwise, and too courteous to push it before seven in the morning.

"Are you all right, Director?"

"I'm fine."

"You look—"

"It's the knee," he said, which was Piet's knee, and was the first lie he had told inside that building in nineteen years, and came out of him smoothly, without any effort at all, in the ordinary voice he used for budgets.

Cassim smiled, and said she would see him at seven-fifteen, and went, and pulled the door to behind her with two fingers, the way you do for someone who is working.

Motaung sat.

There was a protocol for this. He had written that one too, in 2041, after a warrant officer in Springs was named and the desk had spent four hours arguing about who to tell. Where a finding names a member of the Directorate, the distribution is suppressed to the Deputy Director, who authorises the uptake personally. It was a good protocol. It existed so that no man in this building would ever be in a position to see his own name and have twenty minutes alone with it.

It had failed for exactly one reason, which was that the suppression ran off the operations desk at half-past six, and it was twenty to seven, and the Director of Preventive Enforcement had been reading his own distribution with his own coffee at six o'clock every morning for nineteen years, and nobody had thought to build a rule about a man being early.

He looked at the screen for a while longer.

Then he reached down and opened the bottom left drawer, and took out the docket, and put it in his briefcase, and closed the drawer, and went to the standing meeting.

Standing Items

Day One — Wednesday 4 November 2054

The standing was at seven-fifteen in the room with the brown chairs, and he went to it because not going would have been a fact about him.

That was how he was thinking now. He had walked down one flight and along the corridor and taken his place at the end of the table, and somewhere underneath the ordinary business of his body a second Motaung had opened a file and begun working the problem, and the first thing that second man had established was that every single thing Josiah Motaung did between now and the moment the desk noticed would be evidence.

Nine people. Coffee in the government cups. Naidoo from operations with her tablet propped against the water jug, Sibanda from legal, van Wyk from the analytics office looking like he had slept in the server room again, the two section heads from the East Rand on the screen with their audio slightly behind their mouths, Cassim two seats up on his right with a printed agenda, because she printed the agenda, which half the building found charming and the other half found like being marked.

“Overnight,” said Naidoo.

“Two. Both outside the instrument.” She read them out. The R59 hijacking. The nineteen-year-old outside the tavern in Sebokeng. Nobody said anything, because there was nothing to say about the ones they could not see, and because everyone in the room had been in this job long enough to have stopped performing sorrow at seven in the morning.

“Uptakes.”

“Eleven overnight, nine executed, two outstanding. One’s a runner in Katlehong, ops has him by tonight. The other’s a bail address that’s wrong, so that’s a paper problem.”

Eleven, Motaung thought. *Ten*.

“Estate.”

“Eleven thousand three hundred and forty. Two deaths this week, both natural, both over seventy. Clinic’s asking about the dialysis contract again.”

“They asked in September.”

“They’re going to keep asking, Director. It’s a real problem.”

“Then put it on the exec agenda with a number on it,” Motaung said, and heard his own voice come out completely normal, and noted that too.

Sibanda went through the litigation schedule. There were forty-one matters. Thirty-eight of them were the same matter with different names on it: an advocate somewhere applying to see a sealed finding, and the State opposing, and the court declining to order disclosure on the authority of a 2039 judgment that everyone in the room could recite and nobody in the room believed would survive another decade.

“And there’s the Federation’s founding affidavit,” Sibanda said. “The big one. They’ve filed. Two hundred and sixty pages.”

“Summary?”

“Section fourteen sub six is unconstitutional; the sealing regime is an unjustifiable limitation; and they want every warrant issued on a two-one concurrence set aside.”

“On what basis on the last part?”

“Not yet clear, Director. That part of the affidavit is thin. They say they’ll amplify.”

Motaung wrote *amplify* on his pad, because he wrote things on his pad, and looked at the word.

"Grobler's signature on it?"

"Grobler's signature on all of it."

He nodded, and did not feel anything move in his face, and this was where Cassim came in.

"Can I do the seal note now," she said, "while legal's still in the room."

"Go ahead."

She did not stand up, which he approved of, and did not hand anything round, which he approved of more.

"So. Section fourteen sub six was drafted in 2035 as an interim measure. The memorandum at the time said it should be revisited within thirty-six months once the courts had settled the disclosure question." She let that sit for exactly the right length of time. "That was nineteen years ago. My note asks one thing: that the exec puts a review of the sealing provision on the agenda for the March cycle. Not a repeal. A review."

Nobody spoke. Van Wyk looked at the table with the studied blankness of a man who has decided this is above his pay grade and would like that decision minuted by his posture.

"The reason I want it in March," Cassim said, "is that if the Federation's application succeeds and we have never once looked at it ourselves, the finding of the court will be that we did not care. Which will be correct."

"You know what happens if we open it," Naidoo said, not unkindly.

"Tell me."

"Every advocate in the country reads it as an admission. Forty-one matters becomes four hundred."

"Yes."

"And then it's not thirty-eight applications to see a sealed finding, it's a class action, and it's every warrant since 2035."

"Yes," Cassim said again. "That's the argument for never looking at it, and it's a good argument, and it's been a good argument for nineteen years, which is how you get to nineteen years." She turned a page

she did not need to turn. “I’d just like us to have to say it out loud in March, in a minute, with our names next to it.”

Motaung watched her while she did it, and what he saw was a woman making a play, and what he could not see — because eleven weeks was not long enough to learn a person and because he had stopped learning people around the time they gave him a driver — was that she was doing precisely what she had said she was doing, in front of witnesses, on the record, having warned him first at twenty to seven in his own office.

“Anything else on it?” he said.

“No. That’s the note.”

“Circulate it. March cycle.” He wrote *seal review* — *Mar* on his pad, and heard Sibanda breathe out. “That isn’t an agreement with it. It’s an agenda item.”

“That’s all I asked for,” Cassim said, and made a small mark on her printed agenda, and moved to standing item four, and Motaung sat with the peculiar sensation of a man who has just, on the morning he was named, authorised a review of the only provision that was currently keeping a document with his name on it out of public circulation.

Except that he did not know that yet.

Standing item four was the diary. It was read out by a clerk from the registry called Lesego who came up every Wednesday with a printout because the Director had once said, in 2036, that he liked hearing the week out loud. She was twenty-two and she had a mark on her thumb where a pen had leaked, and she was plainly thinking about something else, which as far as Motaung was concerned was the correct way to read a diary.

“Thursday, the Estate visit for the parliamentary committee, that’s the whole morning, minister’s office says four members not six. Friday, nothing. Weekend, nothing. Monday the ninth, the Federation of Security Providers congress opens at the Sandton Convention Centre, that’s a standing security note, we put two liaison officers there every year and they sit at the back and drink the coffee.”

“Any request from us?”

"No, Director. It's just noted because they usually say something about us on the first morning."

"They'll say something about us this year."

"Ja," said Lesego, "probably," and turned the page, and said, "then Tuesday the registry's got the quarterly retention run, that's the sealed findings from 2049 going to long store, I need someone to countersign the schedule because Mrs Motaung says she's not signing another one alone."

"I'll sign it," said Sibanda.

"Thank you." Lesego wrote it down. "And then Wednesday's the audit committee."

That was all. That was the whole of it: a girl with an ink mark on her thumb saying *the sealed findings from 2049 going to long store* in the middle of a list that also contained a dialysis contract and a minister's office being difficult about numbers, and nobody in the room looked up, and the phrase went past the table the way the words *filing* and *quarterly* and *countersign* go past a table, and lodged in nothing.

Motaung looked at the wall clock. Seven fifty-one.

The suppression protocol ran off the operations desk. Naidoo was sitting eleven feet from him with her tablet against the water jug, and it would reach her the way it reached everyone, in a queue, behind the runner in Katlehong and the wrong bail address, and when it did she would read it twice, and then she would look up.

"Anything else?" he said.

There was nothing else. There is almost never anything else at the last item; the room is already thinking about the corridor.

They went out talking. Van Wyk asked Sibanda about the dialysis thing. The two section heads dropped off the screen mid-goodbye, as they always did, so that the last thing in the room was their mouths moving without sound.

Cassim stopped at the door and let him come past her, and said, quietly, "Thank you for March."

"It's an agenda item."

"It's more than it was yesterday," she said.

He went up the flight of stairs rather than the lift, because the lift took a long time, and this morning he did not have any.

At his desk he sat down and put both hands flat on either side of the terminal again, in the same place, which he noticed.

Then he opened the registry system, and typed in the number he had memorised at six o'clock without deciding to, and found the packet, and clicked through to the part of the record that no member of the public and no named person and no advocate in the Republic was permitted to see, which he was permitted to see, because he was the Director.

STATUS Provisional - 1 of 3. Awaiting Readers B, C.

He looked at it for a while.

One. A finding by one Reader was not a warrant and was not a fact; it was a document in a queue. The Act required two. Until a second Reader concurred there was nothing in the Republic that could be done to him, and the whole of the previous two hours had been, in a legal sense, about nothing at all.

Suite B refreshed at eight. Suite C at half-past twelve. He knew the schedule the way he knew his own number plate, because he had signed off the schedule, twice, in two different decades.

So there was a morning in it. Somewhere below him, eleven metres down, behind a door with no handle on this side, two people who had never met him and never would were going to sit down at some point before lunch in front of everything the country had ever recorded about Josiah Thabo Motaung, and one of them was going to decide what he was.

He had spent nineteen years telling committees that this was the most careful process in the world.

He turned his wrist over and looked at his watch, and it was one minute past eight.

Verification

Day One — Wednesday 4 November 2054

There was a correct order of operations and he did it in the correct order, because that was who he was, and because a man doing the correct things in the correct order is a man who has not yet accepted anything.

At 08:20 he read the guidance note he had written in 2039 on the interpretation of *no prior contact*, all four pages, to see whether the man who had written it had left himself anywhere to stand. He had not. It was a good note.

At 08:40 he pulled the four-paragraph security summary on Grobler, Cornelius Johannes, and read it twice. Retired general. Chairman of the Federation since 2046. Wife deceased, two adult children, a farm outside Bapsfontein he did not live on. Media-trained, litigious, and careful. It contained nothing that touched Motaung and no reason on earth why it should.

At 09:05 he did the thing he had been avoiding since six o'clock, which was to check his own diary against the finding, and found that on Monday the ninth of November, at nine in the morning, he had absolutely nothing at all.

The window ran to midnight on Monday. The Federation congress opened at nine on Monday morning at the Sandton Convention Centre with two liaison officers at the back drinking the coffee.

At or adjacent to a public gathering.

He sat for some time with his pen on the pad and did not write anything on it.

The thing that frightened him was not that the machine had found a line running from him to a stranger. The thing that frightened him was that he could see the line himself, now, and had been able to see it for about eleven seconds, and had needed no help.

The registry was on the second floor and had its own smell, which was cardboard and toner and the dry cold of a room kept at nineteen degrees for the sake of the paper. There was a counter with a hatch and a bell that nobody used, and behind it eleven staff, and behind them the racking, and behind that the sealed store with its own door and its own key and its own log.

Motaung came in at 09:50 with his jacket on because he never took it off, and Lesego looked up from the scanner with her ink-marked thumb and said, "Morning, Director," in the voice of a person who is not surprised to see the Director, because the Director came down here about once a fortnight and always had.

"Morning. Is the Registrar in?"

"She's in the store."

"I'll wait."

He waited by the counter, and did not lean on it, and looked at the noticeboard, which had a fire drill schedule and a photograph of somebody's retirement and a laminated card that said **NO FILE LEAVES THIS FLOOR — s.14(6) MATERIAL — NO EXCEPTIONS — THIS MEANS YOU** in a font that had been chosen by somebody in 2037 and never revisited.

Miriam came out of the store with a trolley and a schedule on a clipboard and saw him, and there was one beat in which she was his wife and then a second in which she was the Registrar of Findings, and she did the second one.

"Director."

"Registrar."

Thirty-four years. Two people in a government building with eleven staff watching, and a thing between them the size of a house that neither of them had ever once put into a sentence.

"I need a status on a packet," he said.

"You have terminal access to statuses."

"I need it from the counter."

She looked at him for exactly as long as that took. Then she wheeled the trolley in, and set the clipboard down, and came to the hatch, and said, "Number."

He gave her the number.

She typed it. He watched her face, which told him nothing at all, because she had been reading other people's worst days across this counter for eleven years and had a professional surface that could have been used to level a table.

"Provisional," she said. "One of three. Reader A."

"Anything since eight?"

"Suite B refreshed at eight. There's nothing filed."

"When would there be."

"When there is."

Behind her, at the scanner, Lesego was feeding 2049 retention sheets in a rhythm of four seconds each, and the machine made the small hydraulic noise it made, and the room went on being a room.

"Miriam."

"Director," she said, "there are eleven people on this floor."

He stopped.

"Thank you, Registrar," he said, and went back upstairs, and it was 10:04.

At 10:20 Naidoo came up from operations and stood in his door and said, "Director, have you got a minute," in a voice with something wrong in it, and Motaung's whole body went still in the chair, and then she said, "It's the Katlehong runner, he's in a shopping centre and the centre manager is being difficult," and it took him four seconds to come back up to the surface far enough to answer her.

He handled it. It was not difficult. You told the centre manager that the Directorate would take him out of a service corridor at eight tonight with no uniforms in the building rather than off the floor at eleven in the morning, and the centre manager stopped being difficult, because the centre manager had never wanted anything except to not have it happen in front of the shops.

"Thank you, Director."

"Naidoo."

"Sir?"

He had been about to ask her whether anything else had come through the suppression queue. He heard the question assemble itself in his mouth, and heard exactly how it would sound in a transcript, and let it go.

"Nothing," he said. "Well done on the corridor."

At 12:14 he refreshed the record because he had been refreshing the record every four minutes since half past eleven, and it had changed.

STATUS Provisional - 1 of 3.

Reader B: DISSENT recorded 09:40. Sealed s.14(6) 12:00.
Awaiting Reader C.

He read it three times.

Somebody had disagreed.

Somebody eleven metres below the chair he was sitting in, behind a door with no handle on this side, had sat down at eight o'clock in the morning in front of everything the Republic had ever recorded about Josiah Thabo Motaung and had come to the opposite conclusion, and had signed it, and it had gone into the store at midday, and it was now the property of the State.

He put in the request at 12:21. He was entitled to do that much; the Director's access to the sealed store was in the delegations, three lines, drafted by him.

The response came back in ninety seconds, which meant it had not been read by a person.

REQUEST DECLINED - s.14(6)(c).

A sealed finding may not be disclosed to the subject of the finding, to a representative of the subject, or to any person acting at the instigation of the subject, irrespective of that person's office.

Irrespective of that person's office.

He had written that clause.

Not the section; the section came out of the drafters in the department. The clause. In the spring of 2035 a very tired advocate had sent him a draft with a hole in it, and Josiah Motaung, forty-two years old, six months into building something, had written back at eleven at night to say that unless you closed the door against the Directorate's own people you would have a situation within five years where a senior officer's family or friend was named and the sealed material walked out of the store in a briefcase, and the whole regime would fall on that one story, and the courts would be right to bring it down.

They had taken his wording. Eleven paragraphs. He could still quote the fourth.

He sat in his office on the sixth floor of a building he had argued into existence, nine metres above a room he was not permitted to enter, and the document that said he was not going to kill anybody sat in that room in a folder with a barcode on it, correctly filed, by his wife.

He had the afternoon and he used it.

He went down the list of everyone who could lawfully open the store, which was four people, and worked out that two of them would refuse, one of them would refuse and report it, and the fourth was the Registrar of Findings.

He worked out what the sealed finding was worth if he ever got it, and the answer was: to a court, everything; to a man with six days, nothing. It would not stop an uptake. Dissent did not stay a warrant. It sat in the file and waited for a constitutional case that was currently two hundred and sixty pages long and had Cornelius Grobler's signature on all of it.

He worked out, with a pen, on the pad, in the flat way he would have worked out a staffing model, what a man in his position could actually

do between now and midnight on Monday, and the list came to four items, and he looked at the four items for a long time.

At the bottom of the pad, without deciding to, he wrote: *Who did I upset in the last six months?*

And then, underneath it: *Nobody. That's the problem.*

At 14:02 the terminal made no sound at all, because it never did.

STATUS CONCURRENCE 2 of 3. WARRANT ISSUED s.14(2)(a).
Reader A: concur. Reader C: concur.
Reader B: dissent - sealed s.14(6).
SUBJECT: MOTAUNG, Josiah Thabo.
UPTAKE: for authorisation - Deputy Director.

He looked at *Reader C: concur*, and at the time stamp, and something in the back of his head, in the part that had spent nineteen years reading eleven names a morning, filed a very small objection and could not say what it was objecting to.

Then the phone on his desk rang, and the display said CASSIM, A. — DEP DIR, and Josiah Motaung sat with his hand on the receiver and let it ring twice, because for those two rings he was still the Director of Preventive Enforcement, and after that he was going to be a name on a list that he himself had insisted, in writing, in 2041, must never be shown to the man it belonged to.

He picked it up.

Authorisation

Day One — Wednesday 4 November 2054

“Director,” Cassim said, “I’ve got your packet in front of me.”

“I know.”

There was a small pause on the line, and he understood from it that she had prepared four or five ways to open the conversation and that he had just removed all of them.

“How long have you known?”

“Since six.”

“Since—” She stopped. He heard her decide not to say the rest of it. “Right. Then you know where I am with it.”

“You have to authorise the uptake.”

“I have to authorise the uptake,” she said. “It’s mine under the protocol. Nobody else can do it and I can’t delegate it.”

“I wrote the protocol.”

“I know you wrote the protocol, Director.” A breath. “Can you come down? I’d rather not do this on a phone.”

He looked at the wall of his office. There was a framed photograph on it of the first intake of Readers in 2035, taken from behind, because that had been the compromise. Nine people walking away down a corridor.

“I’ll come down,” he said.

Her office was two floors below his and had the corner he had refused, which he had never once thought about until this exact moment and which he now thought about all the way along the corridor.

She had cleared her desk. Not tidied: cleared. There was the packet, printed, which meant she had gone to the trouble of printing it, and a legal pad, and nothing else.

"Sit," she said. "Please."

He sat.

"Right." She put her hand flat on the printed packet the way you would put a hand on a dog to keep it from getting up. "Here's where we are and I'm going to say all of it, and then you can tell me what you want to do."

"The warrant issued at two o'clock. Concurrence two of three. Under the protocol the uptake is authorised by me, personally, and it goes to the operations desk with my signature on it and not before. Naidoo has the team standing by. She came to me at ten past two and asked, twice, if the name was a system error, because she has worked for you for nine years and it was the only thing she could think of to say."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her to stand the team by."

She turned the legal pad round so he could see it. There was one line on it, in her handwriting, with a time next to it.

"At quarter past two I applied under section sixteen sub three for a twenty-four-hour deferment of execution. That's the provision for a subject who holds an office under the Act. It's been used four times. Three of those were for warrant officers and one was for a clerk in Bloemfontein."

"Who's the designated magistrate this month?"

"Pillay."

He laughed. It surprised both of them; it came out of him flat and short, one syllable, and it was not a pleasant sound in that room.

"Yes," Cassim said.

Magistrate Rina Pillay had been the designated preventive magistrate for the Gauteng jurisdiction for nine years and had heard something in the region of ninety thousand annual renewals in that time, and had declined none of them. Not one. It was not corruption and it was not laziness; Motaung had met her twice and she was neither. It was that to decline a renewal a magistrate must sign her name to the proposition that a finding was wrong, and there is no way on this earth to know that a finding was wrong, and there is a very clear way to find out that it was right, which is to let somebody out and read about it afterwards. Nine years. Ninety thousand. The Directorate's own annual report described the review process as *rigorous*, and Motaung had signed the report.

"So it'll be refused," he said.

"It'll be refused. Probably by five." Cassim did not look away and did not soften it. "Which gives you about two and a half hours, and I am telling you that on purpose, because you are going to ask me later whether I told you and I want the answer to be yes."

He said nothing.

"Director." She leaned forward slightly. "There's another way to do this and I'd like you to consider it. Let me walk in with you. Not the team — me. We go down to the operations floor together at half past four, you hand over your card and your firearm, I authorise it in front of you, and you go out of the front door of this building with your own deputy next to you instead of being taken out of a parkade at six in the morning by two people who are frightened of you." She let that sit. "It matters, what the photograph looks like. Not for you. For the Bureau. And for the eleven thousand at the Estate, whose warrants all look exactly like yours."

And that was the moment.

He would go over it many times, afterwards, and he was never able to reconstruct it honestly, because by the time he came to reconstruct it he already knew the answer and could not unknow it. But something in that sentence turned a key in him. *For the Bureau*. She had said it in the way a person says a thing they have already thought about at length. She had thought about the photograph. She had thought about how it would look. She had thought about the institution's position on the day its founder was named, and she had thought about

it early enough to have an option ready and a magistrate applied to and a legal pad with one line on it.

Eleven weeks.

He heard himself begin to build it, and he did not stop.

She had been in his office at twenty to seven with a memo about the sealing provision, and the finding had been filed at eleven minutes past four. She had asked for the review of section fourteen sub six in front of nine people and put it in the minute. The review committee had sent her, and the review committee had extended him twice, and a committee that extends a man twice is a committee that has run out of reasons and is waiting for one. The seal is the only thing standing between a sealed finding and a public courtroom. Open the seal in March and every dissent in the store becomes discoverable. Every dissent including the one filed at nine-forty this morning eleven metres under this building by a Reader who had looked at Josiah Motaung and said no.

There it was. It went together in about four seconds, the way a thing goes together when the pieces have been machined for it, and every single component of it was true.

None of it meant what he had just decided it meant.

"You've been very thorough," he said.

Cassim went still.

She was not slow. That was the thing about her, and it was the thing he had held against her since the second week: she was not slow, and she heard the whole of it in four words, and he watched her hear it.

"Director," she said carefully, "say that again in a different way, because I want to be sure I've understood you."

"I said you've been thorough. It's a compliment."

"It isn't."

"Then let's call it an observation."

She sat back. Something happened in her face that he read, at the time, as a person's composure closing over a thing they had not ex-

pected to be caught at, and that was, in fact, a thirty-four-year-old woman being told by a man she had admired since she was at university that he believed she had spent eleven weeks constructing this.

"All right," she said. "Then I'll say mine plainly too. I did not do this. I could not have done this if I wanted to; nobody in this building can put a name into a suite, and you know that better than I do because you built the wall. I have spent the last two hours doing the only three things I can lawfully do for you, and one of them is going to be refused by five o'clock, and the other two I'm doing anyway." She picked up her pen and put it down again. "And I'd have said all of that before you looked at me like that, so it's worth nothing now, which I suppose is the shape of it."

"The shape of what?"

"Of your machine," Cassim said. "You can't prove a thing didn't happen."

The air conditioning came on. Outside her window, four floors down, somebody was reversing a delivery van with a beeper, and it beeped eleven times and stopped, and Motaung thought: *the same van*, and then thought that he was noticing the wrong things, and that noticing the wrong things was the first symptom in every subject-behaviour profile the Directorate had ever published.

"Half past four," Cassim said. "My offer stands until then. After that I have to sign, because if I haven't signed by six I'm the story instead of you, and then there is nobody left in this building who can help anybody."

He stood up.

"Director." She stood too. "One more thing and then I'll stop. If you run — and I think you're going to, and I'd like it noted that I said so before you did it — you will be doing it in a country you designed, and you will be very good at it for about a day and a half. And every hour you're out there is an hour of footage of the founder of the Preventive Bureau evading a preventive warrant, and General Grobler's attorneys will play it to a full bench next year with the sound off."

"Are you finished?"

"No," she said. "But that's the useful part."

He went back up the two flights.

Naidoo was in the corridor on the sixth floor talking to a section head, and she stopped talking when she saw him, and the section head looked at the carpet, and Motaung said, "Chief," and Naidoo said, "Director," and that was all of it and it was enough.

In his office he stood for a while without turning on the light.

Then he did four things, in order, the way he did everything.

He took his service pistol out of the drawer, checked it, and locked it in the cabinet, because a man named for a firearm homicide who is carrying a firearm has made an argument on the other side's behalf.

He took his identity card off its lanyard and left it on the blotter, squared to the edge, because it was the property of the State.

He took the docket out of the briefcase, looked at it for a moment, and put it back.

And then he took the fire stairs to the second basement, which came out at the loading bay behind the building, because he had walked that route in 2036 with a clipboard and a security consultant and had personally decided not to put a camera at the bottom of it, on the grounds of cost.

It was twenty-five past four.

The Mesh He Specified

Day One — Wednesday 4 November 2054, 16:25

The loading bay came out onto Vermeulen and he turned left, because right was the taxi rank and left was four blocks of civil-service parking full of people going home.

He walked at the speed of a man going home.

That was the first rule and he had written it into a training module. The Directorate's behavioural layer did not look for faces in a crowd; it had given that up in 2038 after eighteen months of the false-positive rate making the whole programme look like a joke in front of a portfolio committee. What it looked for was *deviation*. A man who walks eleven per cent faster than the ambient flow at a time of day when nobody hurries. A man who crosses against a robot when there is no traffic. A man who does not join a queue.

He joined a queue. He bought a bottle of water at a Fruit & Veg with the two hundred rand that had been in his wallet since a golf day in August, and he stood in the queue behind a woman buying six avocados and a loaf, and he let three minutes of his two and a half hours go, because standing in a queue is the single most invisible thing a human being can do in a city.

The camera above the till was a municipal unit on the 2049 estate. Fourteen-second refresh, and the plate readers on Vermeulen ran continuous but the pedestrian estate did not, because continuous pedestrian capture at that density had cost eleven million rand a month in 2046 and Motaung had personally taken it out of the budget and put the money into the Estate clinic. He had defended the decision in front of the audit committee. It was in a minute.

Fourteen seconds.

He knew what the fourteen seconds meant the way a plumber knows what a smell means.

He did not take a car. He did not go home.

He took a taxi from the rank at Bosman with eleven other people going to Mabopane, and got out at Wonderboom, and took another one going the other way, and paid both in cash, and sat in the middle of the back row both times with his knees up against the seat in front and his head down like everybody else.

There were four and a half thousand plate readers on the Gauteng freeway estate and there were, at the last count anybody had bothered to do, something over ninety thousand minibus taxis. They were in the system. They were in it the way weather is in a forecast, as a mass with a shape, and not as ninety thousand individual objects with names, because in 2039 the association had gone to court about exactly that and had won, and Motaung had written the Directorate's concession memo himself, because the alternative was a two-year litigation that they would have lost in front of a full bench and a headline that read THE STATE WANTS TO KNOW WHERE THE POOR ARE GOING.

He had been right. It had been the correct call. The concession had cost them a measurable amount of capability and had bought a decade of political cover, and he had written the memo in one evening, at his kitchen table, in November, with Miriam doing the crossword across from him.

He rode in the back of a taxi to Wonderboom in the last of the daylight, and it was the best decision he ever made and it was, precisely and in every particular, his own work.

At half past six he was in a chicken place on the corner of a street in Pretoria North with his back to the window, eating because his hands had started to shake and the shaking was chemical rather than emotional and could be fixed with food.

At five past seven, by his own estimate, Cassim would have signed.

At six the next morning, when the overnight distribution went out, the file on Josiah Thabo Motaung would move from *warrant issued* to *execution outstanding*, and at that point it entered the escalation ladder, and the ladder was a table with five rows that had been agreed at a workshop in Benoni in 2040 and had not been changed since.

Row one: the address. Row two: known associates, employer, family. Row three: financial instruments — every card, every account, every wallet, dead within four minutes of a keystroke. Row four: the plate estate on sixteen-hour history. Row five, and only after seventy-two hours, and only with a Deputy Director's signature because a man named Motaung had insisted in the workshop that it be a Deputy Director's signature: full behavioural retrospective, meaning the system stops looking for you now and starts looking for everywhere you have been for the last ninety days, and finds the pattern, and then simply waits at the place in the pattern you have not yet been.

Nobody had ever survived row five. There were people who had lasted eleven days against rows one to four, because rows one to four are a net with a hole in it the size of a person's imagination. Row five is not a net. Row five is a chair, placed where you are going to sit down.

Seventy-two hours from six tomorrow morning was Sunday.

He sat with a plastic fork in a chicken place with his back to the window and worked out that he had until Sunday morning, and then he worked out that the window in the finding closed on Monday at midnight, and then he sat very still, because the arithmetic had just told him something that he did not want and could not put down.

Whoever had done this — and at that hour he was still using the word *whoever* — had not needed to guess. The window and the ladder fitted together like two halves of a moulding. Six days: enough to run, not enough to run out. Row five lands on Sunday and the window shuts on Monday night, and the space between those two facts is exactly one working morning.

Somebody had read the workshop minutes from Benoni.

THE NAMED

Sorter, parcel depot, Alrode.

NAMED	14 March 2051. Concurrence 3 of 3. No dissent.
ANTICIPATED	NDLOVU, Thandi Elizabeth (mother of the subject)
RESIDENT	Doringkop Preventive Estate, Block C, from 19 Ma
ORDER REVIEWED	2052 (renewed) · 2053 (renewed) · 2054 (renewed)
EMPLOYMENT	Estate laundry, from Aug 2051. Satisfactory.
VISITS	Logged 78 of 78 eligible.
	Visitor of record: NDLOVU, Thandi Elizabeth.

He slept four hours in the back of a scrapped Quantum in a yard in Rosslyn that belonged to a man he had arrested in 2026 and had, afterwards, found work for.

That was not tradecraft. There is no module on that. It is the only kind of asset a police officer of thirty-five years actually accumulates, and it does not appear in any escalation ladder because it cannot be modelled: a man in a yard in Rosslyn who owes you nothing and lets you sleep in a scrapped taxi because in 2026 you drove him to a job interview.

He lay on the bench seat with his jacket over him and the smell of old vinyl and diesel, and above the yard the sky did the thing the Highveld sky does in November, which is to go completely still and pale green at the edges an hour before it decides.

He was doing well. That was the trouble. He was fifteen hours into it and he was doing well, and every single thing that had worked had worked because he had built it that way on purpose.

In the design review in 2036 — a Thursday, the old boardroom, van Wyk's predecessor and two consultants and a man from Treasury — somebody had asked him what the target apprehension rate should be for outstanding executions. And Josiah Motaung, forty-three years old, had said: not a hundred.

He remembered the room going quiet.

He had explained it. A system that catches everybody, every time, within an hour, is not a policing system; it is a country nobody wants to live in, and it costs four times as much, and the last four per cent is where all the money and all the tyranny live. He had put the number at ninety-four per cent within forty-eight hours. It had gone into the

specification. It was still in the specification. He had been proud of it for eighteen years and had cited it in two speeches as evidence that the thing had been built by people who were awake.

Six per cent.

He lay in the back of the taxi and understood that he was inside the six per cent, that the six per cent was his own signature on a document, that it was the most humane thing he had ever done, and that it was scheduled to expire on Sunday morning.

Lombard

Day Two — Thursday 5 November 2054

He woke at ten past five because a dog was barking and because he had slept in a vehicle, and a man of sixty-one who sleeps in a vehicle wakes when his hip tells him to.

Dries Lombard was sitting on an upturned crate eight metres away with two polystyrene cups of coffee and his elbows on his knees, waiting for him to be awake, the way you wait for a man you have known for twenty-two years.

“Môre, Chief,” Lombard said.

Motaung did not move for a second and a half.

“How long have you been sitting there?”

“Since about four.” Lombard held one of the cups out at arm’s length without getting up, which was courteous, because it made Motaung come to him and it made it his own decision to. “It’s from the garage, so I’m apologising in advance.”

Motaung came and took it and sat down on the tow hitch of a wrecked Hyundai.

“How?”

“Ag.” Lombard shrugged with his whole upper body, a farmer’s shrug, forty-nine years old and built like a man who had played hooker for a police team into his thirties and then stopped abruptly. “You’ve got four people in this province who’d let you sleep in their yard and not phone. I know all four. I did them in order of how far I’d have to drive.” He drank his coffee. “You were the third one. I want it on

record that I checked a shisanyama in Atteridgeville at half past two in the morning, Chief, because I thought you'd go sentimental."

"I've never been sentimental in my life."

"No," Lombard agreed. "That's why you were third."

The yard was coming grey at the edges. Somewhere on the other side of the fence the dog gave up.

"Are you here to bring me in?"

"If I was here to bring you in there'd be six of us and I'd have done it while you were asleep, which is what the module says, which you wrote." Lombard looked into his cup. "No. I'm here because at half past two yesterday afternoon Chief Naidoo stood in the ops room and told the desk to stand by, and she couldn't get the sentence out. Nine years I've watched that woman brief a room. She couldn't get the sentence out."

"Dries—"

"And then I went and looked at the packet, because internal security may look at the packet, and I read the whole thing twice, and then I sat in my car in the parkade for forty minutes." He looked up. "So. No, Chief. I'm not here to bring you in."

Motaung drank the coffee. It was terrible.

"Then what."

"I'm here to drive you," Lombard said. "Same as always."

The first time Dries Lombard had driven Josiah Motaung anywhere had been the eleventh of December 2027, to a funeral in Katlehong, in a Corolla with a broken air conditioner, in thirty-four degrees.

Lombard had been a constable then, two years in, seconded to the unit because somebody had noticed he could drive and didn't talk. Motaung had been a detective sergeant who had written to three magistrates twice each and had received three courteous refusals and had then stood at the back of a tent in a yard in Katlehong on a Saturday morning while four hundred people sang, and had not gone forward to the family, because what he had to say to the family was *I*

knew, and there is no version of that sentence that is for them rather than for you.

They had driven back in silence for about twenty minutes. Then Lombard, twenty-two years old, with both hands on the wheel and his eyes straight ahead, had said: *You wrote to them, though.*

And Motaung had said: *Ja.*

And Lombard had said: *So next time write to somebody who can do something*, which was the most stupid and useless sentence anybody said to him that entire year, and was also, in a way that took Josiah Motaung about eight years and a change of government to work out, the whole of it.

They had never once discussed it since. It was simply a fact that sat in the car with them for twenty-seven years, and neither man had ever needed to take it out and look at it, and both of them knew exactly where it was.

“Right,” Lombard said, when they were on the R80 in a white Ford single cab with a company logo on the door that Motaung did not ask about. “Talk to me like I’m stupid. What have you got?”

“Six days. Five now.”

“Ja, I read the packet.”

“I’ve got a dissent I’m not allowed to see, a victim I’ve never met, and no contact of record.” Motaung watched the highway go past. “And a window that lines up with the escalation ladder like it was drawn against it.”

“That last part I didn’t get to.”

Motaung told him about Benoni, and row five, and Sunday.

Lombard drove for a while.

“So somebody read the minutes,” he said.

“Somebody read the minutes.”

“Ja, but Chief, those minutes are all over. Portfolio committee’s had them. They were an annexure in the 2049 review. The general’s

lawyers have got a warehouse of that stuff, they subpoenaed—”

He stopped.

He did it well; he did it the way a man stops when he thinks he has said too much about a thing that is not his to say. He changed lanes and let a bus go past and then said, “Sorry. Speculating.”

And Josiah Motaung, who had been awake for two hours, whose hip hurt, who had eaten one piece of chicken in nineteen hours and had spent that entire time doing arithmetic about ladders, heard the word *general* go past him in the cab of a bakkie on the R80 and did not catch it.

He had not said Grobler’s name. He had not said the word *victim*. Lombard had read the packet — internal security may read the packet, and Lombard had said so himself, twice, unprompted, which was one time more than a man needs to say a true thing.

The reader in the back of Motaung’s mind, the one that had been filing very small objections since two o’clock the previous afternoon, filed another one and could not say what it was objecting to, and there were now two of them in there, and neither of them was speaking to the other.

“Where are we going?” he said.

“Boksburg. My brother-in-law’s got a place with a yard and a gate and a room at the back with its own door. He’s in Mozambique till the eighteenth.” Lombard indicated. “It’s not clever, it’s just a bed. You look like hell, Chief, and a man who hasn’t slept makes the decision he’s frightened of instead of the one he’s thought about.”

“Where did you get that?”

“From you. Module four.” Lombard grinned at the windscreen. “You’ve been quoted at me for twenty-two years, I’m going to get one back.”

The room at the back had a bed, a plastic table, a kettle, and a window with burglar bars looking at a wall. Motaung sat on the bed and Lombard stood in the doorway with his hands in his pockets like a man who has delivered a parcel and does not want to be thanked.

"There's bread and there's polony and there's about six Cokes. I'll come tomorrow morning."

"Dries."

"Chief."

"This is a criminal offence. Section twenty-two. Assisting a person against whom a warrant is outstanding." Motaung looked at him. "Four years. Non-negotiable. I put the four in."

"Ja, I know."

"You've got a daughter in matric."

Something went across Lombard's face and was gone, and it was the first genuinely closed thing Motaung had ever seen there in twenty-two years, and he was too tired to read it and read it as embarrassment.

"She's fine," Lombard said. "She's — ja. She's fine. Costs a fortune, the school, but." He knocked twice on the doorframe with his knuckle, the way he always did, the way he had knocked on the roof of the Corolla in 2027 before he got in. "Sleep, Chief."

He pulled the door shut.

Motaung heard the gate, and the bakkie, and then a long quiet with a dove in it.

He lay down on a stranger's bed in Boksburg with his shoes on and thought: *four people in this province*, and thought that Lombard had said it like a man reciting a list he had made recently rather than one he had always carried, and that thought went into the room at the back of his head with the other two, and the three of them sat there together in the dark not talking, and Josiah Motaung slept for eleven hours, which he had not done in nine years, and which cost him Thursday.

Three Rooms

Day Two — Thursday 5 November 2054

The service ramp off Bosman Street smelled of wet tar at twenty past three in the morning, which was how Grace Sithole learned that it had rained in the night. She had slept through it. She minded that. She had grown up in a house with a zinc roof and the sound was the only thing she had ever taken from it.

Elvis had the boom up before the taxi stopped.

“Sisi.”

“Elvis.”

She gave him her phone and her own identity card, and he gave her the lanyard out of the tray: a white card on a blue ribbon with one letter on it, printed large, black. **A**. There was no name on it. In nineteen years nobody in that building had needed her name in order to let her in, and she had stopped finding it strange somewhere around 2039.

The corridor at the bottom was painted the green of a school corridor and lit like one. Three doors, four metres apart, B in the middle. She had never once seen either of the other two open. In 2046 she had come out at the end of a shift and heard a kettle boiling through the wall, and had stood still in the corridor for a moment, listening to it, and then had gone home.

Suite A was four metres by five, no window, one terminal, one tray, one two-plate cabinet with a kettle on it. The kettle furred with scale because Pretoria water is what it is, and she descaled it with vinegar that Elvis brought her in a Coke bottle. The chair’s height adjustment

had gone in February. It sank the moment she sat, all the way, so that her chin came level with the desk edge, and she had put a folded blanket on the seat and got the height back that way. Facilities had sent a man in April who had turned the chair over, looked at the strut, and told her the part was discontinued.

The form was DPE-114. She had put it in in March. She had two acknowledgments.

At 03:41 she logged in. The screen that came up before the queue had her programme number on it, her shift allocation, and a line that said FILES ASSESSED, and then the number, which that morning was 11 041. She had never in nineteen years looked at that screen as anything except the way into the queue.

Four in the queue. Two carried over from Tuesday that she was holding, because holding was allowed and she used it.

She read the front sheet first. The standing instruction was R-9 and it said the front sheet last — record first, then the stack's output, so that the Reader forms her own view of the man before she is told what the arithmetic thinks of him. Grace had read the front sheet first since 2036. She had never pretended otherwise; everything in the suite went onto the session record, audio and keystroke, and if anybody in calibration had a problem with it they had been sitting on it for eighteen years.

GP/2054/11-0904. MABASO, Thulani Wiseman, 38, of Tembisa. Band and features on the front sheet, then the record, and the record took her fifty minutes.

Scaffolding company in Isando, eleven years, foreman since 2050, good attendance. Two protection orders: 2052, withdrawn by the applicant after nine days; September this year, granted, and the return of service said the respondent was not at the address. His wife had moved twice since June, the second time to her sister in Ivory Park, and had taken the boy. On Tuesday evening between 19:40 and 20:20 his bakkie had passed the sister's street four times, which the plate net had, because Ivory Park was inside the continuous estate. Three weeks ago he had said a thing to a colleague at the yard, and the colleague had repeated it to a supervisor, and the supervisor had written it down because there was a form for that now. He had a lounge suite on eleven months of a fourteen-month agreement and

had made the October payment on the second of the month, early, the way he had made every one of them.

That was the part Grace sat with. Not the four passes. A man who does not intend to be alive at Christmas does not pay his furniture on the second of the month, and a man who intends to keep his life exactly as it is, minus one person in it, does.

She typed the finding and read it back twice.

Then she said, out loud, to the room, "Thulani Wiseman Mabaso."

And then, quieter, the way you do when you are keeping your place: "Ukhona."

She signed it at 04:52.

A calibration officer had queried the habit in 2041. Item six, vocalisation during assessment, please clarify. She had written: *I read the names aloud so as not to lose my place in the record.* It was true. She had taught Grade 6 for eleven years and she had called a register every morning of it, and there is nothing in the world easier than skipping a line. It was on the session record, all nineteen years of it, four thousand mornings of a woman saying a stranger's whole name into a sealed room and then answering for him, and it was not a prayer, and if anyone had ever suggested it was she would have laughed at them.

She put the kettle on. Outside somewhere above her head, Pretoria was starting.

They had recruited her in 2035 out of a school in Tembisa where the province had not paid the post since March. The man from the department had been apologetic about the salary, which was more than she had been earning, and specific about the conditions, which were that she would sign an instrument of preventive enforcement and would never be told what came of it, and she had asked one question, which was whether she could still get home for her mother's Sundays. She had signed on the Thursday.

In the year before that she had buried a pupil. Sibusiso Khumalo, thirteen, a stutter he had almost beaten and a horse he could draw from memory, on any paper, freehand, better than the art teacher. He had been in the wrong room of the wrong house in October 2034

when a man came to settle something with his uncle. Grace had gone to the funeral in a borrowed car and had come back and had taught the Wednesday lesson because the class was writing exams.

She did not think about him when she worked. She thought about him roughly four times a year, and it was not why she did this, and she had said so to the psychologist in 2038 and it had been recorded as *insight into motivation*.

The kettle clicked. She made the tea in the mug with the chip and sat down on the blanket and pulled GP/2054/11-0905, and somewhere on the other side of a wall she had never been through, a kettle she could not hear was also boiling.

In nineteen years, eleven thousand and forty-one times, she had never once asked to be told.

Wynand Loots arrived at ten to eight because the shift started at eight and ten minutes was correct.

He hung the lanyard on the hook inside the door instead of wearing it, because the ribbon touched his neck and after six hours he could feel it there. **B.** He filled the kettle to the second line and switched it on and stood while it boiled, which took four minutes and ten seconds, and he knew it took four minutes and ten seconds because he had timed it once in 2051 and found that knowing shortened it.

The chair sank four centimetres in twenty minutes. He had measured that too, when Facilities had asked for details on the form in March, and he had written it in the box in that exact form of words, and Facilities had written back REFERRED TO PROCUREMENT. He re-pumped the chair with the lever three times an hour and no longer noticed doing it.

The stack refreshed at eight. The queue came up at 08:04.

The second packet was a boy of twenty in Vosloorus. GININDA, Katlego Ephraim. Debt to a man who ran a scheme out of a container, a brother-in-law's firearm in the house, two visits by the man in question, one of them at night, and a message the boy had sent on Sunday that a person only sends when they have already decided which of the two of them it is going to be.

Wynand read the record. Then he read the front sheet, last, as R-9 required, because R-9 was the instruction and he had never in twelve years understood why the other two would want it any other way.

It took him eleven minutes. He filed the finding at 09:12 and put his hands flat on his knees and sat for a while with the tray in front of him and his tea going cold in the mug.

There had been a boy in 2050. Lucky Sipho Phiri, nineteen, of Dav-eyton, a tyre place on the Main Reef Road, and in the identity photograph in the packet the boy had a plaster on his chin, from something that had happened three days before he stood in front of that camera and would now be on his face in every government system for the rest of his life. Wynand had filed the finding at 11:20 on a Tuesday morning and had gone home at four and had not come back for four days. There was a form for that too. He had been signed off by a doctor in Menlyn who asked him what he did for a living, and he had said he was in government, and the doctor had said, ag, ja, and written the note.

They had kept him. He knew exactly why they had kept him: calibrating a Reader takes four years and the vacancy freeze had been at two per cent since 2047, and the programme could no more replace him than it could replace the chair. Nobody had ever said this to him. It was in the establishment paper, which was on the intranet, which he had access to.

He had read his own file in 2052, during a grievance about accumulated leave, sitting in an HR office in front of a woman who had left him alone with it for six minutes.

His dissent rate had been 4.1 per cent over his first four years. It had been under one per cent for the last three. The annual review had a heading called Trend and a sentence under it, and the sentence used the word *improvement*, and the man who had written it had not meant anything by it. Wynand had read the sentence twice, and closed the file, and squared its edges, and asked the woman about his leave.

At 11:50 the desk phone rang, which it did perhaps six times a year.

“Wynand? Marlize, from calibration.”

“Sorry. Yes. Good morning.”

"Sorry to bother you, man, it's the six-monthly and also the system throws a flag when there's a variance, so I have to phone, it's nothing. Two minutes." He heard her keyboard. "Sleep okay?"

"Yes."

"Headaches?"

"The usual amount."

"Right. And anything you want to flag from your side? Anything sitting on you?"

Yesterday at noon he had signed a seal certificate. One page, three lines, s.14(6), a signature and a date. It is the only fact about the outside world a Reader is ever handed: not whether you were right, only whether you were alone. He had signed one in September of last year and before that in July, and none in between, and he had known the shape of what he was signing before the registry clerk had finished sliding it across the hatch.

He had been alone. He had read the record twice, and it had not carried, and he had written what it carried instead.

"No," Wynand said. "Nothing to flag."

"Lovely. That's me done. Enjoy the storm, they say it's coming in at four."

He put the phone down and re-pumped the chair and pulled the next packet, and it was correct, and it was what the record carried, and he was not going to be able to say that to anybody for fourteen months.

Karabo Ntuli came on at twelve and the stack refreshed at half past.

She kept the notebook behind the kick-plate of the kettle cabinet, which came away if you put a thumbnail in the left corner and which had been loose since before she arrived. The suite was searched when a Reader left the programme. Clause 11.4 said no record of any assessment, in any form, may be created or retained by the Reader outside the system, and it did not need to set out a penalty, because leaving the programme badly is a five-year non-disclosure order and a debt for your training.

It was a hardcover A5 from the CNA in Braamfontein, eighty rand, the kind with a ribbon.

It had no names in it. She had thought about that in her first month and decided it in an afternoon: names would make it a leak, and it was not a leak. What it had was five columns. Date. The last four digits of the packet reference. Y or N. The shape, in a taxonomy she had built herself because nobody else had — slow domestic, debt spiral, stranger-adjacent, custody-triggered, and eleven others.

And the fifth column, ruled with a steel rule and headed in capitals, which was empty.

Three years of it. Every row.

She made coffee, took the phone directory and the two ream boxes off the chair and stacked them under it, because the strut in her chair had gone the same week as the other two, which she knew because she had the consolidated reference: DPE-114/2054-00212, one form, three suites, raised by a facilities officer in March who had batched them because they were the same fault on the same 2043 stock. It was the only document that had ever existed with all three of them on it. She had written the number down the day she saw it.

The queue had five in it. She worked through three before three o'clock. Two took her nineteen minutes and one took her ninety, because the record had a two-month hole in it where a man had been out of the country and the employment data had been backfilled, and she sent it back to the desk for a fourth-tier pull rather than sign a finding on a hole. That was allowed. That was, in fact, the job.

She was good at it. She knew she was good at it because they had told her so at induction, when her calibration scores had come back as the highest in the programme's history, and because in three years nobody had ever once queried anything she filed. Including yesterday.

Yesterday, at two o'clock, she had sat with her hands flat on the desk for eleven minutes before she signed, which was not a thing she did.

The record had carried. She had read it back twice and it had carried both times, and that was not what the eleven minutes had been about. Something in the grain of the packets had been running the wrong way for months — not in one of them, in the run of them, in the way

the same absences kept arriving at the same answer — and she did not have the sentence for it yet, and a finding is not a place to put a thing you cannot yet say. She had signed it at 14:02 and it had gone into the registry, and the registry had done what a registry does with paper, which is nothing, visibly, forever.

That was correct. Nothing was supposed to come back. Nothing ever had.

So at ten past three that afternoon she opened the forms index and looked for the thing she had known was in there since her second week.

DPE-233 — Request for Disclosure of Case Outcome to Assessing Reader.

She filled it in properly. She was not going to give them a drafting reason. Subject: professional development and personal calibration assurance. She asked for the outcome of one finding. One. Her choice, and she chose the first one she had ever signed, GP/2051/09-0412-C, three years and two months old, a man in Sebokeng, twenty-four, whose record she could still see the shape of when she closed her eyes and whose name she had not written down. She said in the box that she was not seeking the outcomes of any other matter, that she did not seek the identity of any co-assessing Reader, that she was content for the disclosure to be given verbally and not in writing, and that she would accept a single word.

She was not trying to prove it wrong. She had never in three years thought it was wrong. She wanted a denominator.

She submitted it at 15:12.

It came back at 15:49.

It came back on a template. Two hundred and thirty words, the first of which was Dear Reader, refusing the request under s.14(8) and standing instruction R-22, on the ground that knowledge of outcomes contaminates subsequent assessment and that the integrity of the instrument depends upon each assessment being formed without reference to prior results. It regretted any inconvenience. It was signed *p.p. The Registrar of Findings*, and there was no signature, and in the top right corner, in eight point, it said **DPE-233 (Rev. 4)**.

Somebody had rewritten it three times. Somebody had sat at a desk in this building and read the previous version of this refusal and thought: no, that is not quite how to say it.

Thirty-seven minutes. She had spent forty minutes on the wording and it had come back in thirty-seven, which meant nobody had read it, which meant there was a rule and a template and a person whose job included running the template, and that the entire transaction — a Reader asking whether one man was alive — was a known category of event with its own form number.

And under the form number was the reference.

DPE-233/00806.

Karabo sat and looked at it for a while.

Then she took the kick-plate off and got the notebook out and turned to the front, to the first page, where in her first year she had written down four reference numbers that had nothing to do with any finding, because she wrote down numbers, because that was the entire content of her personality according to her brother. The second one was **DPE-233/00741**, from October 2051, which was the last time she had asked this, in her third month, when she was still stupid enough to ask by email first and be told to use the form.

Sixty-five.

Sixty-five in three years, in a programme that has had three chairs in it since 2035 and has never had more than four people in the building qualified to sit in one. Eight hundred and six times, somebody who had signed a finding of anticipated homicide had gone looking through the forms index for the form, and filled it in, and been sent the letter, and there had been enough of them, over enough years, for a person to improve the letter four times.

She wrote **00806** in the second column, under Thursday's date, because it was the only number she had been given all day that anybody was ever going to answer for.

Then she looked at the fifth column, which was ruled and headed and empty, and then she put the notebook back behind the kick-plate and pressed it home with her thumb, and pulled the next packet, because there were two left in the queue and the shift ended at eight.

Above her, through three floors of a 1970s government building, the storm came in at four, exactly as promised, and none of the three of them heard it.

Access Log

Day Two — Thursday 5 November 2054, 20:00

He woke because the room was dark and it had been light.

That was all of it for four seconds. A dark room. A wall. Burglar bars with nothing behind them. Then his hip, then the plastic table, then Boksburg, then everything else, arriving in the order it had left.

His watch said twelve minutes past eight.

He had lain down at half past eight in the morning. He sat on the edge of a stranger's bed in his socks and did the arithmetic on that and got twelve hours, and then he did the other arithmetic, which was what had been done to him while he was unconscious.

Row one had run at six. The address. Two vehicles at the Waverley house before the neighbours were up, and a schedule, and a form.

Row two at six as well, because rows one and two go together in the same keystroke and he had signed off the interface himself. Known associates, employer, family. Which meant that at six o'clock this morning the name MOTAUNG, Miriam Nomsa had gone onto a list in a building she had worked in for nineteen years, along with Cassim, and Naidoo, and every person who had eaten a plate of food at his table since 2035.

Row three by four minutes past. Card, account, wallet, all of it. He had a hundred and forty rand in his inside pocket and a bottle of water he had bought on Vermeulen the day before yesterday, which he now understood as most of what he owned.

Row four ran continuously and did not need a keystroke.

Seventy-two hours from six this morning was six on Sunday.

He had slept through a fifth of what he had left. There was no version of it that was not his own body's fault, and he sat with that for about a minute, and then he got up and filled the kettle, because a man of sixty-one who has slept twelve hours in a chair-shaped room needs to drink something before he is any use to anybody, and because there was nothing else in the room to do.

The kettle had a light in the base that came on orange. He watched it and thought about the two constables in his kitchen.

Lombard came at ten past nine, and knocked twice on the doorframe before he opened it, the way he always did.

He had a plastic bag with bread and a whole cooked chicken in it and four Cokes, and a brown A4 envelope which he put on the plastic table without any ceremony whatsoever, under the bag, so that the bag was the thing being delivered.

"You look better," he said.

"I slept."

"Ja, I know. I came at two and you were flat on your back with your shoes on and I closed the door again." Lombard sat down on the one chair, backwards, with his forearms on the backrest. "Eat something."

Motaung tore a leg off the chicken and ate it standing up.

"They did the house," Lombard said.

"What time."

"Twenty to seven. Sergeant Mabaso and a constable, Kekana. Twenty minutes. It's in the log as a rows-one- and-two attendance, no forced entry, no damage. They took the laptop and two photograph albums because one of them's got a zip pocket and the schedule says anything with a closed compartment." He said all of it in the flat voice he used for reading out a duty roster. "Kekana asked your wife what the plant on the stoep was. She's got a mother who grows them."

Motaung stood with a chicken leg in his hand.

"Was she there."

"She was there."

"And?"

"She made them coffee," Lombard said, "and then she went in to work at eight, same as every day."

Motaung put the chicken down on the bag and wiped his fingers on his trousers, which he had never in his life done in front of another human being.

Of course she had gone in. Not going in would have been a fact about her, and a fact about her was a paragraph in somebody's summary, and Miriam Motaung had spent eleven years filing other people's paragraphs.

"Right," he said.

"There's one other thing." Lombard slid the brown envelope out from under the bag and put it in front of him and took his hands off it. "You asked me to look at everything."

"I did."

"So I looked at everything."

Motaung opened it.

It was four pages, printed on the registry's own printer, which was the one that put a hairline down the left of every page and had been on the replacement schedule since 2051. It was an access log extract from the sealed store. The first page was a header and a period and an index term, and the index term was GROBLER, C.J.

SEALED STORE - ACCESS LOG EXTRACT

REGISTRY, 2ND

PERIOD 01 Sep 2054 - 05 Nov 2054

INDEX TERM

GROBLER, C.

OPERATOR M. MOTAUNG (0431), Registrar of Findings

02 Sep 10:14	SS/54/09-0221	index query
02 Sep 10:31	SS/54/09-0224	index query, expanded
09 Sep 15:02	SS/54/09-0388	retrieval, folder GP/2049/03-1140
...		
27 Oct 09:14	SS/54/10-1902	index query, expanded
30 Oct 14:47	SS/54/10-2011	retrieval, folder GP/2051/08-0774
03 Nov 16:52	SS/54/11-0093	index query, expanded

04 Nov 12:11	SS/54/11-0140	retrieval, folder GP/2054/11-0883-B
04 Nov 12:57	SS/54/11-0146	retrieval, folder GP/2054/11-0883-B
05 Nov 08:12	SS/54/11-0171	index query

31 events in period. Operator authorisation current. No irregulari

He read it once at ordinary speed, the way you read a summary. Then he read the middle of the third page again with a finger on the line, the way you read a line you are going to have to repeat out loud later.

The room went on being a room. The kettle clicked off behind him, having boiled for nobody.

"Internal security may pull access logs," Lombard said, to the table-top. "It's in the delegations. Same as the packet."

"I know what's in the delegations."

"Ja."

Motaung squared the four pages on the plastic table.

"What do you make of it?"

"I think it's a log, Chief."

That was the whole of it. Lombard did not lean forward, did not lower his voice, did not say *now I'm not saying anything, but*. He sat backwards on a chair in his brother-in-law's back room with his forearms crossed on the backrest and he let four pages of the Republic's own record sit on the table between them and say what they said, which was nothing, in the way that a thing says nothing when it is thirty-one events long and has your wife's staff number on every line.

"Thirty-one," Motaung said.

"Thirty-one."

"In nine weeks."

"That's what it says."

Motaung folded the pages in three and put them in his inside pocket, next to a hundred and forty rand.

"Take me to Waverley."

Lombard's chin came up. "It's row one, Chief. It's been row one since six this morning."

"I know what it's been since six this morning."

"There'll be a unit on the street."

"There won't," Motaung said. "There's a camera pair on the corner of Fifth and a request out to the response company, and there is no unit, because a static observation on a suburban street is two people and a car for six days and the ops budget for outstanding executions is a hundred and ten thousand a month for the province." He put his jacket on. "I signed that too."

Lombard looked at him for a second and a half. Then he stood up and put the chair back under the table, squarely, which he did not usually do.

"I'll drop you at the top of the servitude," he said.

The armed response company that covered his street was a Federation member firm, and the Directorate's request had gone to it at six o'clock this morning through the members' portal, which the Federation administered, which meant that Cornelius Grobler's organisation had been formally advised of Josiah Motaung's address before Josiah Motaung had finished his first hour of sleep.

He noticed it walking up the servitude between the Mbathas' wall and the Pillans' hedge, in the dark, with a folded printout in his jacket, and he filed it, and he did not do anything with it, because he had four pages in his pocket with a staff number on them and there was only room in him for the one thing.

The gate at the back had a bolt that had been painted over in 2039 and had to be lifted before it slid. He lifted it and slid it. The yard smelled of the jasmine that was over the tool shed and of somebody two houses down burning wet garden refuse, which was illegal on a Thursday and had been every Thursday since they moved in.

The kitchen light was on.

She was at the table with her reading glasses on and the *Star* crossword folded into a rectangle in front of her and a pen, and she looked

up when the security gate went, and did not stand.

Thirty-four years was in the room and it was in the arrangement of the objects. His mug was on the left of the rack because he was left-handed and hers was on the right, and there were two of everything, and the salt was on the windowsill because she had put it there in 1994 to keep it dry and had never once moved it. The wall calendar from the funeral parlour had her mother's date on the twelfth in her handwriting. The chair at the end was the chair nobody sat in because it wobbled and neither of them had ever thrown it out.

"You've lost weight," Miriam said. "In two days."

"I've eaten."

"Mm."

She got up. She took two mugs off the rack, his in her left hand and hers in her right, and put them on the counter, and reached for the kettle.

"Miriam."

"There's chicken in the fridge and it's yours, so don't look like that."

"Sit down. Please."

She stood at the counter with her hand on the kettle for a moment. Then she put one of the mugs back on the rack, on the left, where it lived. She did it without any particular emphasis, the way a person puts a thing back when they have remembered they do not need it, and it was the single most eloquent movement Josiah Motaung had ever watched a human being make, and he read it, at the time, as guilt.

She sat down opposite him with her glasses in her hand.

He took the four pages out of his jacket and unfolded them and turned them round so they faced her, and put his finger flat on the header.

"Sealed store access log," he said. "First of September to today. Index term GROBLER, C.J. Operator zero four three one."

"I know my staff number."

"Thirty-one events." He moved his finger down the page as he went, and his voice did not go up at any point, because it had nowhere

to go up to. "Second of September, ten fourteen, index query, four minutes. Same morning, half past ten, expanded. Ninth of September, three o'clock, retrieval, a 2049 folder, twenty-six minutes. Fourteen in September, nine in October. Twenty-seventh of October, expanded query. Thirtieth of October, retrieval, a 2051 folder."

She looked at the page. She did not touch it.

"Third of November," he said. "Sixteen fifty-two. Expanded query."

"Josiah."

"The third of November is the day before I was named. My finding was filed by Reader A at eleven minutes past four the following morning."

"I know when it was filed."

"Fourth of November, twelve eleven. Retrieval. Folder GP twenty fifty-four, eleven, oh eight eight three, B." He kept his finger where it was. "Thirty-eight minutes. Then again at twelve fifty-seven, twelve minutes. And this morning at twelve minutes past eight, an index query, six minutes, while two of my officers were driving away from this house with your photograph albums in the back."

The fridge hummed and stopped.

"At ten to ten yesterday morning," Motaung said, "I stood at your counter in front of eleven of your staff and asked you for a status, and you told me Suite B had refreshed at eight and nothing had been filed. And at eleven minutes past twelve you took the sealed finding on your husband out of that store, and you had it for thirty-eight minutes, and then you took it out again."

"Yes," Miriam said.

He waited.

She put her glasses on the table, folded, with the arms squared, and she did not fill the silence, and the silence went on for a length of time that would have broken a suspect in an interview room in Katlehong, and Josiah Motaung had run four hundred of those and knew exactly what he was doing and did it anyway, on his own wife, in his own kitchen, with the second mug back on the rack.

"There is a—" she said.

And then she stopped.

He watched her stop. Something went across her face that was not fear and was not calculation in the way he understood the word, and afterwards, much later, when he was able to think about it at all, he would recognise it as a woman counting. She got three words in and she counted something, and whatever the number came to, she put the sentence down on the table between them and left it there.

"No," she said.

"No what."

"No, I'm not going to explain it to you."

"Miriam."

"Have you eaten?"

"Don't."

"It's not a deflection, it's a question. You are sixty-one and you've been sleeping in yards." She got up and went to the cupboard above the microwave, and took down the yellow box, and pushed a strip of blood-pressure tablets across the table and left it lying next to the printout. "That's the last of it. There's a repeat at the Dis-Chem in Rietfontein and they don't need the card."

"The finding says *no prior contact of record*," he said. "That line is the reason I cannot answer it. There is nothing in the world between me and that man. And there is a log in my pocket with your number on it, thirty-one times, against his name, going back two months before anybody had ever heard of any of it."

"I can read a log, Josiah. I've been reading them since you were still driving a Corolla."

"Then read that one to me."

"No."

"Who has been in the store with you?"

"Nobody has been in the store with me."

"Has anybody from the Federation contacted you? Their attorneys. Anybody. In September, in October, at any point—"

"No."

"Then what am I holding?"

"You're holding an access log," Miriam said, "which is the second most accurate document in that building and tells you nothing at all, and you know that better than any person alive, because you wrote the note in 2039 about what a record of contact is and what it isn't, and half the magistrates in this province have got it in a lever arch."

She was not raising her voice. She had not raised her voice at him since about 2011.

"You've come into my kitchen at half past ten at night with a printout," she said, "and you've read me my own staff number off it, with a finger on the line, the way you'd do it to a boy in Tembisa. Thirty-four years." She looked at the page, upside down to her, and then at him. "It's a good printout. Where did you get it?"

He did not answer that.

He heard himself not answer it, and he heard what not answering it meant, and he sat in his own kitchen and did not say the name of the man who had put four pages in his hand at ten past nine, because a source is a source, and because Dries Lombard was committing a section twenty-two offence for him at that exact moment in a bakkie at the top of the servitude with the lights off.

"Josiah." Miriam put both hands flat on the table, the way she did before she stood up from a meal. "Ask me a different question."

The clock over the door was the one from her mother's house. It was two minutes fast and had been for nineteen years, because if you fixed it you would have to take it down.

"Fine," he said. "Then I'll ask this one again, and I'll ask it properly. On the third of November, at ten to five in the afternoon, with no warrant in existence, no packet, no distribution, nothing — what were you looking for in the sealed store under the name of the man I have been named to kill?"

She looked at him for a while.

Then she got up and turned the tap on and ran water into her mug and stood at the sink with her back to him, which was a thing she had done at the end of every difficult conversation of their marriage, and which he had understood for thirty-four years to be the end of it.

"You should go before eleven," she said. "The response patrol does Fifth at about ten past."

He went out through the yard and lifted the bolt and slid it, and pushed the gate to behind him without letting it bang, and walked down the servitude in the dark past the Pillans' hedge, and found when he got to the top that he had a strip of blood-pressure tablets in his left hand and could not remember picking it up.

The bakkie was where it had been, with the windows down. Lombard was eating a Bar One and listening to the radio with the volume on two, and a woman was calling in from Primrose to say that her street had been a war when her children were small and it was not a war now, and that people forget, and the presenter was being polite to her.

Motaung got in and shut the door.

"Chief."

He put the tablets in his jacket pocket, on top of four folded pages, and looked out through the windscreen at the top of a suburban servitude in Waverley at twenty to eleven at night.

Thirty-four years and she had not given him a sentence. Cassim had a magistrate, a legal pad and eleven weeks. Naidoo had stood the team by. Pillay would sign anything that was put in front of her, twice a year, for nine years. Every one of those was true, and he laid them end to end in about four seconds the way he had laid five true things end to end in a deputy's office the previous afternoon, and got an answer, and the answer was sitting next to him with a chocolate wrapper and a police haircut and had been sitting in a yard in Rosslyn since four o'clock that morning with two cups of coffee.

There was one person left. He knew it the way he knew the fourteen seconds.

"Where to?" Lombard said.

“Anywhere,” Motaung said. “Drive.”

Lombard put it in gear and took them down past the school and out onto the main road, and the radio went on being polite to the woman from Primrose, and neither of them said anything for eleven kilometres.

From the Other Side

Day Three — Friday 6 November 2054, 06:10

He had come out of Pretoria at eleven the night before with a thing settled in him, and it had settled the same way two things had already settled this week, and he had not slept.

The rank at Tembisa is awake all night, which is why he had chosen it. He sat two hours in the shelter with his collar up and his hands inside his jacket, and at half past five he bought tea from a container shop on the corner for eight rand and took it out onto the pavement and sat on the low wall by the burglar bars with his back to the brick.

He had a hundred and sixty rand of his own and three hundred that Lombard had left folded under a kettle in Boksburg and had not mentioned, and that was the entire estate of the Director of Preventive Enforcement, because rows one to four had gone live at six o'clock on Thursday morning. Row three took the cards. Four minutes, one keystroke; he had signed the service-level agreement with the banks in 2042 and the four minutes had been a negotiation. Row four was running now, sixteen hours of plate history rolling forward every hour. Row five was Sunday.

Two mornings.

The street came up in the order streets come up. A man in a Pikitup jacket wheeling a drum. The shop's shutter going over on its rollers with a sound like a train a long way off. Three schoolchildren in white shirts, far too early, sharing a packet of chips for breakfast because that is what is open. Above the shops the flats went two storeys, cream once, with a concrete stair at the end and a landing that ran the length of them, and washing on the rail, and a satellite dish nobody

had used in fifteen years.

Behind him in the queue for the first taxi to town two women were talking about a third woman's brother.

"They took him in the Easter."

"Ja, but that one," the other said. "That one they were right about. Hulle vat nie sommer nie."

He drank his tea. That was the folk arithmetic and it was not stupid; it was the only arithmetic available to a person standing at a rank, and it had the shape of a truth in it. Murder in this province was at a level last recorded in 1908. He knew the number the way he knew his own ID. He also knew the number of people at Doringkop this morning, which was 11,347, and had been 11,347 on Wednesday, because the only way that number goes down is a funeral.

At six o'clock the overnight distribution had gone out to the district desks with his own name in it for the third morning running, and at the same moment, in a room in Kempton Park with a whiteboard and a kettle, two officers had been handed a packet.

The white Corolla came up the street at eight minutes past six and he knew what it was before it stopped.

Not the make. The Directorate ran what the state ran. It was the speed.

Twenty-five, thirty in a fifty. A vehicle looking for a number on a wall in a street where half the numbers are gone. It went past the flats, stopped, reversed forty metres without hurry, and parked with the nose out and the left wheels off the tar, which was in module two, because a vehicle parked nose-out does not have to turn around in front of a crowd.

He had written module two.

Two officers got out and did not slam the doors.

The sergeant was about forty, thickset, with a plaster wound round his left thumb, and he had the packet folded lengthwise in his hand the way a man carries something he has read on the way. The constable was young, twenty-four or twenty-five, and she stood a second at the

boot with her fingers at her ear, and Motaung watched her take out a hoop earring and put it in her breast pocket and do the other one.

No jewellery on an uptake. Nothing that catches, nothing that can be grabbed, nothing that shines. That was in module two as well, and it was there because in 2039 a constable in Vosloorus had lost most of an earlobe and the Directorate had paid for the surgery and then written a line into a manual so that it would not have to again.

They came up the concrete stair together and the constable let the sergeant go first.

Number on the door before the door.

The sergeant stopped, checked the number on the door against the packet, and folded the packet away into his jacket, out of sight, because you do not stand at a woman's door holding a file with her name on it.

Four knuckles. Three times.

The knock came across the road, four knuckles, three times, at the volume you would use for a neighbour coming to borrow a plug adaptor.

Ninety per cent open the door themselves.

The door opened.

She was in the doorway with a dishcloth in her hand and her uniform tunic already on, the maroon one the schools use, and she was thirty-seven or thirty-eight, and she had the face of a woman who is up early on purpose and not late for anything.

“Ma’am? Mrs Baloyi? Constance Baloyi?”

Sergeant, surname, unit. Then the constable. Then the sentence.

“Sergeant Mabaso, Preventive Enforcement. This is Constable Zwane. May we come in? You’re not in trouble.”

She stood back and let them in and the door stayed open, which they always did, and which was module three, because a closed door is the difference between an uptake and a story in the paper.

From the wall across the road Motaung could see about a metre and a half of the inside: the end of a couch with a crocheted cover, a wall unit, a plastic bag of empty two-litre bottles standing by the door where you put them when the water goes off in the afternoon and you have learned to fill them in the morning.

A boy came into the metre and a half and stopped.

Nine, at a guess. School shirt, no jumper yet, one shoe on and one shoe in his hand, and he stood in the middle of the room the way children do when adults they do not know are in it, which is very still and entirely awake.

Motaung put his tea down on the wall.

The sergeant took the card out of his top pocket. It was laminated. It was laminated because paper shakes in a man's hand and a shaking page is the first thing everybody in the room looks at, and that had been a finding in a review Motaung had chaired in 2037, and the lamination had cost the Directorate about four thousand rand a year ever since.

He held it at chest height. Not up at his face, where it hides him. Chest height, so that the person can see his mouth.

Slowly. It is written to be read slowly.

"Mrs Baloyi, in terms of section fourteen of the Preventive Enforcement Act, a finding has been made that you will cause the death of another person within the next six days."

You have not committed an offence.

"You have not committed an offence. You are not under arrest. No criminal record arises from this."

Preventive custody. Doringkop. Resident and not a prisoner.

"You are being taken into preventive custody at Doringkop Preventive Estate, where you will be a resident and not a prisoner. You have twenty minutes to pack. You may make one telephone call now and further calls from the Estate this evening. You may take personal effects up to one bag."

Do you understand what I have read to you.

“Do you understand what I have read to you?”

He had written that as a question because a statement lets them nod. He had argued about it for an hour with a man from Justice who wanted *the above has been explained to the subject*, and he had won, and the man from Justice had been right about three other things that day and Motaung had conceded all three to get this one.

Constance Baloyi said, “Wait. Wait, wait.”

If asked, read again, at the same pace.

It was at the bottom of the card, in italics. He had put it in italics himself. The sergeant took a breath and started again from *Mrs Baloyi*, and he did not go faster, and he did not go slower to make a point, and Motaung, sitting on a wall across the road with cold tea beside him, mouthed the fourth line and the seventh and stopped mouthing it because the boy had moved.

The boy had come to the doorway. He was holding the shoe against his chest with both arms, the way you hold something you have been told not to drop.

There is no line on the card about a child.

He knew that the way you know a thing you have known for nineteen years without ever once having had to look at it. Twenty minutes came out of a study. One bag came out of a study. The number for the duty advocate is on the back in eleven-point because a review in 2038 said nine-point was not legible in poor light. Four hundred and some pages of guidance, twelve modules, a laminated card, an hour of his life spent fighting a man from Justice about a question mark.

And there is no paragraph anywhere in any of it about a nine-year-old standing in a doorway with one shoe.

She asked whether it was a mistake. He could not hear the sergeant’s answer from the wall but he knew its shape: two Readers had concurred, there is a review of the order every year. He could have said it in his sleep. He had said it in a lecture room in Pretoria with a broken air conditioner to eleven intakes of officers, and he had said it well.

She asked who. They all asked who. The named person is not disclosed to you, ma'am. That is for their protection and for yours.

The constable had moved a step and a half to the left, out of the doorway, hands in front of her where they could be seen, and she had not touched the weapon on her hip and would not, and she was doing it properly, and she was the same age as Steenkamp.

Then Constance Baloyi said something with her hand flat on her chest, and the sergeant said something, and she said, clearly, in the way people speak when they have found one thing in the wreckage that they can still do:

"I must phone the school. I've got the gate key. There's nobody who can open the gate."

Motaung sat on the wall with his hands in his pockets.

One call now and further calls from the Estate this evening. He had written the *now* because the studies in 2036 had shown that people who are permitted a call at the end of the twenty minutes use it worse than people permitted a call at the start, and he had been proud of that finding; it was in a paper.

She used it on the gate.

She stood in her own front room with the phone at her ear and told a man named Petrus that the key was on the hook by the fridge in her house and that his sister must fetch it, and to tell Mrs Khoza that the Grade Twos' floor was done but the hall was not, and she was crying by then, and she did not stop giving instructions while she cried, and the sergeant stood by the wall unit with his eyes on the middle distance and let her finish. She said she was sorry, twice, about the hall.

Then she gave the phone back and put both hands over her mouth for about four seconds.

Then she went to pack, because there were fourteen minutes left, and she knew there were fourteen minutes left, because she had heard the number and she was a woman who ran a building to a timetable.

A woman came out onto the landing from two doors down in a gown

with her arms folded and did not ask anything and did not go back inside.

Upstairs a man in a security company's jacket, coming off night shift with his boots in his hand, stopped at the rail and looked down into the open door for a while, and then clapped twice, hard, the flat crack of it going down the street.

Somebody said, low, from a window: "Thula wena. Ngumakhelwane wakho."

He stopped. He put his hands in his pockets and went on up to the top of the stair and stood there instead.

Constance Baloyi came out at seventeen minutes with a bag. Motaung, from across the road, could see that it was a school sports bag with a brand name on it and that it was not full, and he knew without needing to know that it had the wrong things in it. It always did. Chargers and no charger cable. Four tops and no underwear. Something of the child's, always something of the child's, and no shoes but the ones on.

The boy came out behind her holding the hand of the woman in the gown.

She crouched down to him on the landing. The constable, Zwane, twenty-four years old, went down on her haunches next to them with her forearms on her knees so that her face was at the same height as the boy's face, and said something short to him, and there is not a word about that in module three or module four or anywhere else, and Motaung had never in nineteen years been asked to write one, because the studies were about packing times and complaint rates and how loud to knock.

The boy said something back to her. She nodded once, seriously, as though it had been a fair point.

Then they went down the concrete stair, and the sergeant carried the bag.

The manual required it. Sergeant Modise had argued against that clause for years, in writing, twice, and had been overruled both times, once by him. A man carrying his own bag is still a man. The counter-argument was that a subject with both hands occupied by a bag is

a subject who is not being touched by an officer, and the counter-argument had won because it was correct.

Mabaso carried the bag with the plastered thumb hooked under the strap, and he put it in the boot and closed the boot with his palm instead of slamming it, and opened the back door and put his hand flat above the door frame while she got in, which is not in any module at all and which every officer in the country does.

He was sixty-one years old and he was sitting on a wall in Tembisa and he was the only person on that street who knew every single thing that was going to happen before it happened.

He could cross the road. He could go up the stair and say his name. It would take about nine seconds to be believed, because there was a photograph of him on the wall of the room in Kempton Park where those two had been handed the packet that morning, and about four seconds after that the sergeant would be looking at the name eighth on his own distribution list, and the constable would be on the radio.

He could go up and tell them that the paperwork was correct. It was. He had read enough packets to know what one looks like when it holds.

He could go up and tell them that the paperwork was correct and that it did not settle anything, and the two of them would look at him the way people look at a man who has come to explain the thing they are currently carrying down a stair.

Whatever he did, at eight o'clock this morning Constance Baloyi would be at Doringkop, and the file would say that a member of the public had interfered with an uptake, and there would be a review, and the review would recommend a line in a module.

He sat with his hands in his pockets.

The Corolla pulled out, nose already facing the right way, and went down towards the robots at the same speed it had come, and stopped at the red, and waited for it, and turned.

The woman in the gown took the boy inside her flat and shut her door.

The queue behind him had moved twice while he sat. The shop man

came out with a bucket and threw grey water into the gutter and looked at the flats and said, to nobody, "Eish," and went back in, and the day carried on being a Friday, because it was.

Motaung stood up off the wall. His left knee had locked from the cold brick and he put a hand on the burglar bars and straightened it and waited for it.

There was a plastic bag of empty two-litre bottles still standing inside the open door of number 8, and somebody would move it, and it would not be him.

He picked up the cup, put it in the drum by the shop, and walked down to the back of the queue for the first taxi going to town.

Change Control

Day Three — Friday 6 November 2054, 07:40

The man in Rosslyn had phoned a man in Kempton Park, and the man in Kempton Park had phoned Elias Mokwena, and at twenty to eight on Friday morning Elias Mokwena unlocked the side door of a municipal customer care centre that had been closed since March 2051 and let Josiah Motaung into it without asking him a single question.

Elias was sixty-four and came Tuesdays and Fridays to check the roof and run the taps, because the facilities contract ran to 2056 and nobody had cancelled it, and a building with dry traps smells. He had brought two boiled eggs in a Tupperware and a two-litre Coke bottle full of tap water. He put the eggs on the counter where people used to queue for their rates accounts, and he said, “The bathroom on the left works. The one on the right you must not use,” and then he went and sat in his car in the shade with the door open and the cricket on.

Motaung took the two hundred rand out of his shirt pocket and left it under the Tupperware, because a man who has been let into a building for nothing is a man who owes something, and he could not afford to owe anybody anything he could not pay before Sunday.

The floor was long and low with a false ceiling and eleven service windows, and every window had a number above it in vinyl and a laminated notice under the glass in three languages telling people what documents to bring. Three hundred people a day used to stand in here. Now the renewals happened on a phone in forty seconds and nobody had stood in this room in three and a half years, and the room was, by any measure anybody had ever put in front of a portfolio committee, a success.

Window four still had a terminal on it. The screen came up grey and then blue and asked for a user.

The user was on a laminated card taped to the underside of the desk, because it had always been on a laminated card taped to the underside of the desk, and it still worked, because changing a shared counter credential required a form countersigned by a Regional Revenue Manager, and there had not been a Regional Revenue Manager since the 2052 consolidation.

He sat down at window four on the staff side of the glass and looked at the queue rail for a moment, and then he started.

What he had was a provincial shared services desktop with counter privileges, which was to say: the interdepartmental document repository, the court rolls, the companies register, the Gazette, the procurement portal, the audit submission archive, and nothing else. He could not reach the Directorate. He could not reach a finding, a packet, an operational record, a stack, or the sealed store, and he had spent part of 2043 personally ensuring that a terminal like this one never could.

He had also, in 2041, written the four-page note on investigative method that went into module two, and its first line was that you do not look for the man, you look for the paper the man had to move.

He put the pad on the desk beside the keyboard and wrote six things on it and worked down them in order.

At three minutes past eight the building's air conditioning came on by itself somewhere above the false ceiling, ran for ninety seconds, and stopped. It did that every hour, all morning. By ten the room was twenty-eight degrees and he had taken his jacket off, which he had not done in a working environment since about 2038.

Item one took eleven minutes and gave him nothing. His diary was not a public document, but the congress was, and the congress had been in the Gazette since June and on the Federation's own site since April, and any person alive who wanted to know where Cornelius Grobler would be standing at nine o'clock on Monday morning could have known it for seven months without leaving a trace anywhere, because knowing it was not an offence and required no system.

Item two took the rest of the hour. The 2054 distribution list for morning findings had forty-one recipients and he had approved every name on it, and he went down the list to see whether anybody on it had any business anywhere near a security company, and one of them did: a liaison officer whose wife's brother had a company that put guards on construction sites in Centurion. He wrote it down. Then he sat back and was honest with himself about what he had, which was a man he had never met, a wife he had never met, a brother-in-law with nine employees, and a sentence that would have made him get up and leave the room if somebody had brought it to him in an office.

He did not scratch it out. He put a small dot next to it, which was what the dot had always meant.

He did Cassim first, because she was the largest item, and because doing her first meant he was not avoiding her.

The Legal Practice Council roll had her admitted in 2046, no complaints, no findings. The 2044 article was still up on a university repository: eleven pages by a candidate attorney arguing that s.14(6) could not survive s.35(3)(i), competent, badly cited in two places, and precisely the sort of thing a review committee reads before it sends somebody to a directorate it is worried about.

The companies register gave him three hundred and forty-one people called Cassim holding directorships in Gauteng and not one of them was her. He ran the Federation's forty-two member companies against the register and got a hundred and sixty names, and none of them was her, and none of them was anyone she had ever appeared for. The procurement portal had her nowhere. She had never been on a panel, an evaluation committee, or a bid adjudication. She had claimed subsistence twice in eleven weeks, both times for Bloemfontein, both times short.

And on the magistrate's court roll for Wednesday the fourth, at Pretoria, sitting in chambers, there was one line:

16:58 s.16(3) application, Directorate of Preventive Enforcement (deferment) - dismissed.

Filed at 15:12. Dismissed at 16:58. She had gone to court on Wednes-

day afternoon, in the two hours after he had walked out of the loading bay, and she had asked a magistrate to hold his warrant for twenty-four hours, and the magistrate had said no.

He sat and looked at the line for a while.

An application that fails costs the applicant nothing at all. It costs an afternoon and a filing fee, and afterwards it is a fact about you: it is a thing that is on a roll, in a public record, with a time stamp, saying that you tried. He had made exactly that calculation himself on Wednesday morning about a meeting he did not want to attend, and he had made it in four seconds, and he had been right.

He wrote on the pad: *Cassim — nothing*.

He looked at it.

There was nothing. That was the finding. Eleven weeks of a deputy director's professional life and it was clean the way a surface is clean when somebody has cleaned it, and there was no procurement, no company, no association, no attendance, no correspondence, no travel, no interest declared and none undeclared, and a failed application on the record at 16:58 on the day.

He did not cross it off.

Item three on the pad was the timings, and item three was the only one with a real edge on it.

The warrant had issued at 14:02 on Wednesday. The magistrates' court in Pretoria stops accepting applications in chambers at 16:00 and a deferment under s.16(3) takes about ninety minutes to draw. If you wanted a warrant to be alive and outstanding before anybody could get in front of a magistrate about it, 14:02 was a beautiful time for it to issue, and 14:02 was a function of when Suite C had refreshed.

So: had anybody moved a refresh window.

That was a question with a paper answer. The Directorate's infrastructure had sat on provincial shared services until 2050, and even after the split the ICT change register was still submitted quarterly to the Auditor-General through the provincial portal, in the format the

Auditor-General had specified in 2038 and had never changed, because the Auditor-General does not change formats. Read only. Ten years back.

He filtered on the assessment suites and got fourteen results and read all fourteen.

Certificate renewals in 2051 and 2053. A UPS replacement. A firmware baseline in 2052 that had required four hours of downtime on a Sunday and had generated more paperwork than everything else on the list put together. Two changes to the shift-handover printer. A rack move.

And, at the bottom, the schedule itself.

Nobody had touched the refresh windows in five years. The last change to them was in 2049, and he opened it because he opened everything, and it came up as a batch extract in the Auditor-General's format, with the four items either side of it, the way that format renders.

GAUTENG SHARED SERVICES · ICT CHANGE REGISTER			EXTRACT -
READ ONLY			
BATCH		RAISED	APPROVED
2049/11-B		03 Nov 2049	
29	DPE/PRN	Roll back print driver v4.2 → v4.1, 4th floor MFDs.	
30	DPE/FAC	Visitor badge stock, change of supplier, Struben St	
31	DPE/ASM	Stagger suite refresh windows (A 04:00 / B 08:00 / to reduce ingest queue contention at changeover.	
32	DPE/NET	Replace failed UPS module, basement rack 6.	
33	DPE/FAC	Reglaze window, 2nd floor east, storm damage.	
40 ITEMS.	COUNTERSIGNED	MOTAUNG, J.T., Director	11 Nov 2049

He read it twice.

Nothing had been moved. The times were the times, and they had been the times since 2049, and whoever had built the six days had not needed to touch a refresh window to do it, because the refresh windows were public in the sense that everything at the Directorate was public: they were in the standing operating procedure, they were in the induction pack, and they had been an annexure in the 2049 review.

The name on the item was T. Mokoena, and Motaung remembered T. Mokoena for about four seconds and then properly. Thabiso. Systems manager, infrastructure, a small careful man who had run the basement and had worn a fleece indoors in February, and who had left in 2051 for Christchurch, where his sister was, and there had been a card in the canteen and a Woolworths voucher and nine people including Motaung had signed the card.

The countersignature at the bottom was his.

Batches came up to him every second Thursday in those years, in a plastic wallet, forty items at a time, and he signed them in the twenty minutes before exco with the wallet flat on his knee because his desk had a stack of leave forms on it. Forty items. Printer drivers, badge stock, glass, a failed UPS. He had done that for eleven years and there was no version of him, at sixty-one, that could tell you a single item out of a single batch, and no version of any director anywhere who could, and that was what a batch was for.

He did not remember it. There was nothing to remember. Item 31 of forty on the eleventh of November 2049, a Thursday, at 16:44, and the man who raised it now lived in New Zealand.

He went back and opened the other three batches from that quarter as well, because doing three quarters of a job is how you end up in front of an inquiry, and there were a hundred and eighteen items in them and not one of them was on the suites. Then he checked the emergency changes, which are the ones that get raised after the fact and are therefore the only ones worth reading, and in five years there had been nine, all nine of them power, all nine of them signed off by facilities.

The plumbing had not been interfered with. He had wanted it to have been, because interference is a person and a person can be found, and it had not been, and that closed the only line of enquiry on the pad that would have led anywhere he could go on foot.

He wrote *CR batch 2049/11-B* on the pad because he wrote reference numbers on pads, and then he wrote, underneath it, *sched. unchanged since 2049 — dead end*, and then he drew a line through item three, and went on to item four.

Item four was the minutes.

Somebody had read Benoni. Somebody had read a five-row table agreed in a training centre in 2040 and had built a six-day window against it so that row five landed on Sunday morning and the window shut on Monday night, and Motaung had spent Wednesday night in the back of a scrapped taxi working that out, and it was the only honest piece of evidence he had.

Lombard had said the minutes were all over. He was right, and it took forty minutes to prove how right.

The portfolio committee had them, as an annexure, from 2049. A master's student at Wits had them, under PAIA, granted in 2052, and there was a two-page reasons letter attached explaining why the fifth row's threshold had been redacted and the rest had not. The State Attorney had them.

And on the discovery schedule filed in the Federation's constitutional case, on the fourteenth of August 2054, at item 118 of a hundred and forty items, was: *Record of departmental workshop, escalation protocol, Benoni, 14–15 August 2040, including minutes and annexures A–D*. Discovered in full. Unredacted, because the redaction had been argued and lost in June.

The certificate at the foot of the schedule was signed by the Directorate's head of legal.

Sibanda, N., who had stood in the standing meeting on Wednesday morning with a bundle under his arm and said the affidavit was two hundred and sixty pages and that this part of it was thin and they said they would amplify.

The Directorate had handed the Federation the ladder. Correctly. Under an order of court, on advice, on a schedule signed by a competent man who had discovered every document he was obliged to discover, because the alternative was an adverse inference and a costs order and a headline.

Motaung sat at window four in a shut building in Kempton Park with the heat coming off the false ceiling and understood that there was no frame to find in the sense he had been looking for one. Nobody had bribed a Reader. Nobody had moved a clock. Nobody had forged a thing. Every single door that had needed to be open had been

standing open for years, held open by a statute, a court, an audit format and a man doing his job properly, and all anybody had needed to do was walk through them in the right order.

He wrote on the pad: *Who was at Benoni*. Then he wrote: *Who briefed the general*. Then he stopped writing, because both of those questions had the same answer and the answer was on the other side of a table he was not sitting at.

At five past one the aircon came on above him and ran for ninety seconds and stopped.

Forty-one hours to row five.

He logged off correctly, because the session belonged to a municipality and a session left open on a counter terminal is how buildings like this end up in an audit finding, and he put the chair back under the desk.

Elias was still in the car with one leg out of the door. There had been a wicket. He was not pleased about it.

Motaung gave him the key.

"You didn't take the egg," Elias said.

"No."

Elias reached into the car and got the Tupperware and held it out through the window with the lid off, and waited, in the way of a man who has all day and intends to spend it here.

Motaung took the egg.

"There's a phone at the Engen," Elias said, "by the wash bay. It takes coins. It's been broken since the winter but it takes coins."

Motaung ate the egg standing in the parking bay of a building that used to have three hundred people a day in it, and then he folded the page off the pad and put it in the briefcase with the docket, and walked out onto the road at ten past one to go and find out what it cost to sit down with Cornelius Grobler.

Indemnity

Day Three — Friday 6 November 2054

He came out of the municipal building in Pretoria West at ten past one with nothing.

Four hours at a terminal somebody had left logged in, and what he had was a supermarket bag of printouts, a list of maintenance windows, three retention runs, and a two-line entry from 2049 about a refresh schedule that he had copied down because he copied things down. Housekeeping. A building's worth of it. Nowhere in any of it was there a single keystroke that belonged to a person with a reason.

It was ten past one on Friday afternoon and row five unlocked at six on Sunday morning. Forty-one hours.

Lombard was on the far side of Church Street in the white single cab with the window down and his elbow out, parked on a yellow line in front of a hardware shop, eating a pie.

"You look worse than yesterday," he said.

"I slept in a municipal office."

"Ja, well." Lombard moved the bag off the passenger seat. "Get in, Chief, I'm committing an offence here and the metro's got a woman on this block who's got no sense of humour."

They went south with the windows down because the aircon had never worked in any vehicle Dries Lombard had ever driven him in. Mo-taung put the supermarket bag in the footwell and the briefcase on

his knees and held it there with both hands, the way a man holds a thing he has been carrying for two days and has stopped noticing.

"So," Lombard said. "I've got something and I don't like it and I'm going to tell you about it anyway, because if I sat on it and you found out later you'd be very polite to me for about nine years."

"Tell me."

"Wednesday night a woman phoned my private number. Not the switchboard. The private one." He indicated, checked, changed lanes. "Says she acts for a client with an interest in the review application. Says her client would like an hour of the Director's time, off the record, no names on paper, and if I happened to be in a position to pass that on, I should. Then she said thank you and put the phone down before I could ask her anything, which I want on record was very professional and very irritating."

"Who is she?"

"Attorney. Sandton firm. I checked the number, the number checks out, the firm exists, she exists, she's been admitted since 2041." Lombard shrugged with his whole upper body. "That's what I've got. It's not much. I sat on it for two days because I wanted to phone somebody about it, and then I worked out there's nobody either of us can phone."

Motaung looked at the road.

"You said you don't like it."

"Three things." Lombard held up the fingers off the steering wheel, one at a time, the way he had briefed rooms for twenty years. "One. Anybody who wants you alone in a room right now wants something from you and it isn't your health. Two. If it's the general's people, then it's the general's people, and you're the subject of a finding with his name in the victim field, so you being in a room with anybody near him is a gift to whoever put you there. Three." He stopped.

"Three."

"Three is that I can't come in with you and I hate it."

The N1 went over them and the shadow came into the cab and went out again.

"Why can't you come in?"

"Because I'm internal security and I've got a card and a face and if anybody at all sees me standing next to you, I'm not the man who's driving you around any more, I'm the man in the docket." Lombard said it without any weight on it at all. "I'll sit in the car. I'll be forty metres away with the engine on. It's rubbish and I know it's rubbish."

Motaung did the arithmetic, which was not difficult, because there was almost nothing in it.

Four days. He had had four days. He had a dissent he was not allowed to see, a victim he had never met, and a window that fitted the escalation ladder like the two halves of a moulding, and every hour of the four days had produced more certainty about what had been done to him and not one gram of evidence about who. He had been to a house in Waverley and had come out of it knowing exactly one thing for certain, and the one thing was sitting next to him driving a bakkie.

"They said an hour," he said.

"They said an hour."

"They said what the client has?"

"She said her client can put something about the finding in your hands that he can't put in a letter." Lombard looked across at him for the first time. "Chief, I'm not telling you to go. I want that said out loud. I'm telling you it exists. There's a difference and I'm not going to sit here and pretend there isn't."

"I know the difference."

"Then say no and we'll go to Boksburg and eat polony like animals and I'll never bring it up again."

Motaung watched Sunnyside go past, the blocks of flats with the washing on them, the schools coming out.

"I'm not saying no."

The parkade was off Steve Biko Road, one of the concrete ones from the eighties, seven levels and a boom and a pay station that took

cards and a woman in a booth who did not look up. Half past two on a Friday and the government offices had been emptying since noon, so level three had about nine cars on it and a car guard in a reflective vest who whistled them into a bay they had not asked for.

Lombard gave him five rand.

"Forty metres," he said. "I'm here."

He knocked twice on the doorframe with his knuckle as Motaung got out, the way he always did, the way he had knocked on the roof of the Corolla in Katlehong in 2027 before he got in.

There were four of them, standing by two vehicles at the far end where the ramp came up.

Motaung read them at thirty metres because he had been reading men across parking areas for thirty-five years. Good suits, and good in the sense of expensive rather than in the sense of well-worn; three white shirts and one blue; forties, all of them, and two of them ex-police, which he could see from where they put their feet. None of them was armed in any way he could see, and he looked, and he kept looking, because looking is free.

The vehicles were a grey Hilux double cab and a white Fortuner. Both had a decal on the door.

RIDGEWAY PROTECTIVE SERVICES, it said, and under that a PSIRA registration number in numerals about forty millimetres high, because the regulations required it to be legible at ten metres, and the regulations required that because a committee had said so in 2041, and Josiah Motaung had sat on the committee.

The biggest of the four came forward with his hand out.

"Director. Neville Ackerman, operations." Handshake, once, dry. "Thank you for coming. Nobody here is going to touch you. If anybody touches you my registration goes and I've got fourteen years on it, so it's not principle, it's arithmetic, and arithmetic's better."

"Who is your client?"

"I'm not told that."

"Who is the attorney?"

“Also not told. I get a job number and an address and a time.” Ackerman said it without apology and without smugness, a man describing a shift. “I can tell you it’s about ninety minutes’ drive, that we’re not going anywhere with a gate that locks behind you, and that we’re contracted to bring you back to a place of your choosing tomorrow or the day after, at your say-so.”

“And if I say no?”

“Then I’ve had a bad afternoon and you’ve had a bad afternoon.” He half turned. “Charmaine’s got the paperwork either way. She’s got to have the paperwork either way, that’s the whole thing about Charmaine.”

The woman came round the front of the Fortuner with a clipboard.

She was about forty-five and she was wearing new shoes that were hurting her; there was a plaster on the back of her left heel, and she walked like a person who had put the plaster on in a car. Her lanyard said C. BEUKES, RISK & COMPLIANCE, and had a photograph on it that was at least eight years old.

“Meneer,” she said, and then, “sorry, Director. Director. I’m sorry, I’ve been saying meneer all day, I did three site inspections this morning.” She turned the clipboard round and held it out at exactly the angle at which a document is meant to be read by the person signing it. “This is our indemnity. It’s the same form we use for everybody. I have to take you through it, I can’t just hand it to you, it’s a condition of our accreditation.”

“Take me through it.”

She took him through it.

RIDGEWAY PROTECTIVE SERVICES (PTY) LIMITED

PSIRA 0042/1174/09

Member: Federation of Security Providers

INDEMNITY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF VOLUNTARY ATTENDANCE

Ref RPS/PTA/54/2213

Book 41, page 88

1. I attend a private meeting of my own free will.
2. No force, threat, inducement or promise of benefit has been made to me by the Company or by any person known to the Company.
3. I have been offered the opportunity to obtain legal representation.

before departure, and to make one telephone call.

4. Transport is provided at the Company's cost. I may end the journey at any time by asking the driver to stop, and the driver shall stop at the first place at which it is lawful and safe to do so.
5. I indemnify the Company, its directors, employees, agents and clients against any claim arising from my attendance.

ATTENDEE (print) _____ ID No. _____
 Signature _____ Time _____ Date ____/____/2054

DECLINED TO SIGN [] Reason, recorded verbatim: _____

For the Company N. ACKERMAN (Operations) signed 06/11/2054
 Witness C. BEUKES (Risk & Compliance) signed 06/11/2054

It was a triplicate book. White, yellow, pink. He could see the carbon between the leaves.

He read clause four twice.

Somebody's attorney had drafted this, and had drafted it well, and had started from the Directorate's own uptake protocol, which was a published document, published because he had insisted in 2038 that it be published, on the argument that a procedure nobody may read is a procedure nobody may complain about.

"Clause three," he said. "The telephone call."

"There's a phone in the vehicle. You can use mine if you'd rather, I just have to note the number." She had her pen ready over the clipboard, and she waited, and she was entirely prepared to stand in a parkade for as long as it took him.

He thought about it for four seconds.

There was a landline in a kitchen in Waverley and there was a woman who had stood in front of it on Thursday night and had not explained herself. There was a Deputy Director whose signature was the only thing between him and row five. There was a switchboard he had built.

"No," he said.

Beukes made a mark. "That's noted as offered and declined, I'm not

writing a reason unless you want to give one.”

“I don’t.”

“That’s fine.” She turned the clipboard back round to him. “Then it’s your name in print, your ID number, your signature, and the time. I have to fill the time in myself, I’m sorry, it’s my clock.”

He printed his name. He wrote his identity number from memory, which he had not had to do since 2019, because the card was in a drawer in Struben Street with his firearm, and he got it right, all thirteen digits. He signed. The pen was a cheap ballpoint with a chewed cap and it belonged to her and she was going to want it back.

“Fourteen thirty-eight,” she said, writing it. “Thank you, Director, you write very clearly. You’d be amazed.”

She tore along the perforation and gave him the yellow copy.

He had been going to ask for one.

He folded it in half and then in half again and put it inside the briefcase, into the flap at the back, where a docket from 2027 had been sitting since Wednesday morning, and he shut the briefcase and turned the two brass catches, and both of them clicked.

“Director,” Ackerman said. “The Fortuner. Middle seat in the back, if you don’t mind. It’s not about you, it’s the vehicle policy.”

“Whose policy?”

“Ours. Client-transport protocol. Anybody who isn’t staff sits centre rear, so that they’re on camera and neither of my guys is between them and a door handle.” He held the door. “I’ll be following in the bakkie with Charmaine. There’s water in the door pocket, it’s been in there since this morning so it’s warm, I apologise.”

The interior smelled of a pine tree hanging from the mirror and of somebody’s takeaway from lunch. The telematics unit was screwed to the dash below the vents, a black box the size of a paperback with three lights on it, and Motaung looked at it and knew what it was, because there had been a paper about fleet behaviour scoring in front of him in about 2044 and he had read it and had not needed it.

The man on his left reached across, took the seatbelt, drew it out and clicked it into the buckle beside Motaung's hip.

"Sorry," he said. "It chimes at the driver and it's a demerit on his score. He gets a warning letter."

"I can do my own belt."

"Ja, no, I know." The man sat back and did his own. "Force of habit. We do the elderly clients."

Sixty-one years old, and he had been called an elderly client by a man in a good suit who had then apologised for warm water, and there was not one thing on the yellow carbon copy in his briefcase that a court could look at and call an abduction, and it was going to be dark in five hours, and row five unlocked at six on Sunday morning.

He put the bottle of water in his lap and did not open it.

The Fortuner came down the ramp with its lights on, which was policy, and stopped at level one to pay, because the ticket had to be validated, and the machine took eleven seconds. At the boom Motaung looked left across the deck and Lombard was still there, forty metres away, parked where he had said he would be, and as they came past he lifted two fingers off the top of the steering wheel.

Motaung did not lift anything back, because his hands were on the briefcase.

The boom went up. They came out onto Steve Biko Road into the Friday traffic and joined the queue for the robot with everybody else, indicator on, in the correct lane, and the man on his left asked him whether he was comfortable and whether the window was letting in too much wind, and the light went green, and the car moved.

Part Two - The Dissent

DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTIVE ENFORCEMENT
FINDING OF ANTICIPATED HOMICIDE
REGISTRY GP/2054/11-0883-B

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
s.14(2)(a) Preventive Enforcement
FILED 04 Nov 2054 09:40
** SEALED - s.14(6) - NOT FOR DISCLOSURE

SUBJECT
ANTICIPATED VICTIM
WINDOW

MOTAUNG, Josiah Thabo
GROBLER, Cornelius Johannes
06 days, expiring 24:00, 09 Nov 2054

FINDING: The subject will not cause the death of the named person.
will remove himself from the window and will not be within reach of
person at any point during it.
Intent formation: assessed absent.
READER'S NOTE: None.

Shirtsleeves

Day Three — Friday 6 November 2054

The tar ran out past Skeerpoort and the last eleven kilometres were graded dirt with a strip of grass down the middle of it, and Motaung knew the road, because the Directorate had held a two-day strategy session at the end of that road in March 2043.

He had chaired it. There had been a flip chart and a man from Treasury and a braai on the second night at which nobody had enjoyed themselves.

Nobody in the car said anything about that and he did not raise it.

They came through the gate at ten to seven with the light going orange on the rock above the dam. One guard. A boom, a clipboard, a fold-out camping chair the man had clearly brought from home, and a thermos standing in the sand next to it. The guard was about sixty. He looked at the driver, and then at the front of the vehicle for the disc, and then he lifted the boom and said, “Sharp, ou Petrus,” and Petrus said, “Sharp, Solly,” and that was the security at the entrance to a property holding four hundred hectares and a chairman.

In 2030 there would have been six men on that gate and three of them would have been carrying rifles.

Motaung noted it. He noted it the way he noted everything, in the flat register in which he had spent nineteen years noting things, and it went into the same place as the fourteen-second refresh and the taxi concession and every other fact in his life that was both a professional achievement and a fact about a world he could not now get out of.

The chalet was number six. Thatch, a stoep, two guinea fowl walking across the grass with the particular offended gait of guinea fowl, and a brass card holder screwed to the door at eye height with a printed card in it.

MR J. MOTAUNG.

The lodge's typeface. Printed that afternoon, then, by somebody in an office with a laminator, off a rooming list that had been amended.

The woman with the clipboard came up the step behind him with his briefcase and gave it to him with both hands, which is how you hand somebody a thing you have been told not to open.

"That's yours," she said. "It's on the form as one briefcase, contents not examined. If you want to check it against the form I'll wait."

"I'll check it."

She waited on the stoep while he opened it on the bed. Everything was in it, in the order he had left it in, including the docket, which had a bulldog clip on it from 2027 and a corner of the cover gone soft from being carried.

"It's correct," he said.

"Then I'd like you to initial here, and here, and there's a copy for you." She tore the sheet along a perforation. "General Grobler eats at eight. If you'd rather have a tray sent, that's also fine, and I've been asked to say that in those words."

He looked at her. She was about forty-five and she had a lanyard with her own company's name on it and not the Federation's, and she was not enjoying any of this and was doing it correctly anyway.

"Is there a telephone in the room?"

"On the table by the bed. Dial nine for an outside line."

"Does it work?"

"I don't know, sir," she said. "Nobody's told me anything about the telephone."

When she had gone he stood in the middle of the room for a while. Then he went to the door and opened it.

The corridor was a stoep and the stoep was empty. There was a moth against the light and the sound of a generator somewhere behind the kitchens and the dam smell coming up off the water. Fifty metres away a man in a lodge polo shirt was carrying a crate of empties and did not look up.

He closed the door and did not lock it, because there was no key in it, and there was no key in it because it was a conference lodge in the Magaliesberg and there never had been.

Grobler was at a table under the lapa in shirtsleeves, with his sleeves turned back twice and his forearms on the wood, going through a folded newspaper with a pen.

He was a big man gone slightly soft at sixty-eight, with the neck of somebody who had done contact sport badly and been treated for it late. When he saw Motaung he capped the pen, put it in his shirt pocket, and stood up, which took him a second longer than he plainly expected it to.

“Direkteur.” He put his hand out. “Neels Grobler.”

“I know who you are.”

“Ja, but I’ve been in three photographs in my life and two of them were bad.” He kept the hand out. Motaung took it. It was a dry, unremarkable handshake from a man who had shaken a great many hands and had no further interest in the subject. “Sit, man. Sit.”

There was a third man at the far end of the table, mid-twenties, in a golf shirt, with a laptop and a charger running to an extension lead and a graze across two knuckles that was about three days old.

“Divan Steyn,” Grobler said. “He’s from the attorneys. He costs me seven thousand rand an hour and he eats my meat as well.”

“Sir,” said Divan.

“Sit,” Grobler said again, and then, to the table generally, in the voice of a man announcing the order of business: “Ek praat nou Afrikaans, want ek wil hê ons moet eers eet soos mense. Divan tik niks.”

Divan folded the laptop halfway down and left it like that, at an angle, the way you leave a thing you have been told to be ready to open.

Motaung sat.

The food came out on a tray from the kitchen carried by a young man Grobler called Sifiso and thanked twice. Lamb, pap, a tomato and onion smoor in a cast-iron pan with the handle wrapped in a cloth, a bowl of green beans that nobody was going to touch. Grobler served Motaung first and gave him the outside cut without asking and then noticed he had not asked, and said, "Sorry, I should've asked. Do you want the middle? I'll swap."

"It's fine."

"It's not fine, it's the best piece, that's why I gave it to you." He sat down. "Eat. Then we'll talk."

They ate. A francolin was making its noise down by the dam and the light had gone the colour it goes in November about half an hour before the mountain turns black. Motaung had eaten one boerie roll and a packet of Simba since eleven that morning and his hands had the chemical shake in them again, and he ate the way he had learned to eat in 2027 on a night shift, quickly and without comment, and Grobler did not watch him do it, which was a courtesy, and Motaung was aware of it as a courtesy, and that annoyed him more than the drive had.

Then Grobler put his knife down.

"Right," he said. "Ek gaan nou Engels praat, want die volgende deel moet in die nota wees. Divan."

Divan opened the laptop.

"Mr Motaung." Grobler's English was slower than his Afrikaans and about thirty per cent less friendly, and that was clearly the point of it. "You are not detained. There is no lawful basis on which I could detain you and I have not tried to build one. You came here in a vehicle you got into voluntarily and there is a signed indemnity to that effect which you have a copy of. That vehicle and a driver are available to you tonight at any hour, to any address in Gauteng, including Struben Street. You have been offered a telephone. Nothing has been put to

you this evening concerning any legal proceedings and nothing will be until tomorrow morning.” He looked down the table. “Divan, has he been offered the vehicle?”

“He has, General.”

“Has he declined it?”

Both of them looked at Motaung.

He understood exactly what was being done and it was not being done to him; it was being done to a transcript, for a hearing in about eighteen months, in front of people who would be reading it cold. He had built a bureau on that principle. He had a training module on that principle.

“I’ve declined it,” he said.

“Thank you.” Grobler waited a beat for the typing to stop. “Dankie, Divan. Sit hom toe.”

The laptop closed.

“Nou kan ons praat,” Grobler said, and reached over and took the beans.

“How many people know I’m here?”

“Four.” Grobler answered it immediately, without doing the thing people do where they look up and to the left. “Me. Divan. Petrus who drove you, and Marlene who did your form, and that’s five, I’ve counted wrong, I always count wrong, that’s why I had a staff.” He put beans on his plate. “And by Monday it’s six, because this place invoices the legal fund and the legal fund is audited by a firm in Rivonia who will see a room booked in your name on a Friday, and they will ask, because I pay them to ask.”

Motaung had come out of a parkade in the back of a car three hours earlier and had spent all three hours composing questions, and he had not expected any of them to be answered, and had certainly not expected the answer to include the part that hurt.

“Anybody in my building?”

Grobler ate the beans.

"Ek gaan daai een nie antwoord nie," he said.

"That's an answer."

"Nee," Grobler said, "dis 'n weiering. Jy's oud genoeg om die verskil te ken."

He said it pleasantly, and went on eating, and Motaung sat in the lapa of a conference lodge he had once chaired a session in and understood that he had just been given a straight refusal by a man with no obligation to give him anything at all, and could not remember the last time anybody in his own building had refused him to his face instead of putting it in a memo.

He liked him.

It arrived like a symptom.

"You know what I'm named for," Motaung said.

"Ja."

"Say it."

"No," Grobler said. "Tomorrow. Tonight we eat and I'm going to bed at half past nine because I'm sixty-eight and my back is finished." He turned his glass a quarter turn on the table. "You've had three days of it in your head with nobody to say it to. I'm not going to be the first person you say it to at nine o'clock at night when you've been in a car. Tomorrow you'll have had eight hours and there'll be coffee and I'll have my files out and we can both be professionals about it."

"You've thought about the sequence."

"Man, I've thought about nothing else since Wednesday."

"So have I."

"Ja," Grobler said, "but you've been thinking on foot."

The two of them sat for a while with the francolin.

"You were at the funerals," Motaung said. "Twenty-nine, thirty."

"Eleven of them."

"That's a number you keep."

"That's the number." Grobler picked up his pen and put it down again, which appeared to be a habit rather than a signal. "Sixteen months, that. Eleven of my own people. I was the cluster commander for the East Rand from the March and I buried eleven, and one of them I buried on the Tuesday and went back to work on the Wednesday, and I want to say that was because I was strong. It was because there was nobody else to do the parade."

"Do you have their names?"

"Ag, of course I've got their names, what kind of a question is that." No heat in it. "Thabiso Mahlangu. Twenty-four. Vosloorus, March 2029. Complaint number I could still give you, and I'm going to, because you work with numbers: 2029/03/1147. House robbery in progress at half past eleven at night. It was not a house robbery in progress. It was a family's own boy coming in through his own kitchen window because he'd lost his key at a party."

Motaung waited.

"An armed response vehicle got there four minutes before my people did," Grobler said. "Private. Two-man crew, one of them nineteen. He fired at movement coming round the corner of the house and the movement was Constable Mahlangu."

He said it in exactly the register he had used for the invoice and the audit firm.

"And you went into that industry three years later," Motaung said.

"I went into that industry three years later."

"And you chair it now."

"And I chair it now."

"Neels." Motaung put his hand flat on the table, once. "Do you hear yourself?"

"Every day of my life." Grobler smiled at him, and it was a genuinely amused smile, the smile of a man who has been waiting for somebody to catch up to a thing he worked out a decade ago on his own. "Direkteur. Listen. I'm not going to pretend to you tonight. In 2031 I took the pension and in 2034 I was running a company that sold

armed response into the same streets I buried Mahlangu in, at three hundred and forty rand a month a house, and by 2036 it was four hundred and sixty, and the reason it was four hundred and sixty was that people were frightened, and the reason people were frightened was correct.” He shrugged. “I made money out of the worst four years this province ever had. I’m not going to sit here and tell you it was a calling.”

“There’s a thing in his pocket,” Motaung said. “Isn’t there. There always is.”

Grobler looked at him.

“A shopping list,” he said. “His mother’s. He did her shopping on his way home off night shift because the shop opened at six and he knocked off at six. It was in the tunic. Washing powder, two things, and Stork, and she’d written *not the cheap one*.” He turned the glass again. “I had to give the tunic back to her and I gave it back with the list still in it, because I couldn’t work out whether taking it out was better or worse, and I have thought about that decision for twenty-five years and I still don’t know.”

The generator behind the kitchen cut out and came back.

“Did you go forward,” Motaung said. “At the funerals. To the family.”

“Every time.”

“All eleven.”

“All eleven,” Grobler said. “It’s the worst thing in the world and you have to do it, because if you stand at the back of the tent you’re not there for them, you’re there for yourself, and everybody in the tent knows it, including you.”

Josiah Motaung sat very still with a piece of lamb on his plate that he was not going to eat.

He had stood at the back of a tent in a yard in Katlehong on a Saturday morning in December 2027 while four hundred people sang, and he had not gone forward, and there was a docket in a briefcase in chalet six with a bulldog clip on it, and the man across the table had no idea he had just said any of that, because the man across the table had not been talking about him at all.

He did not say anything. There was nothing available.

Grobler, misreading the silence entirely, and courteously, poured him water.

"You buried one," he said, after a while. "That's what your file reads like. One, and it's the only one in there."

"One."

"Ja." Grobler nodded slowly. "That's worse. Eleven you can carry as a total. One is a person."

"Don't do that."

"Do what?"

"Understand me," Motaung said. "I've had three days of people understanding me and every single one of them wanted something."

Grobler laughed. It was a short, real, surprised laugh, and he put his hand up in apology for it.

"Fair," he said. "Fair. Then let me want something out loud, so it's honest. I want you at that table tomorrow with your reading glasses on, because you're the only man alive who can tell me whether the thing I've built is any good, and I don't have anybody left who'll tell me the truth about it. Divan there tells me it's beautiful. Divan is twenty-six and he's paid by the hour." He pushed his plate an inch away from himself. "That's what I want. It's not a small thing to want and I'm not dressing it up."

"You want me to check your homework."

"I want you to check my homework."

"And then?"

"And then it's Saturday night and we'll see." Grobler stood up, in two stages again, one hand on the table. "Ek gaan slaap. Breakfast is from six, they'll do you eggs, the coffee is filter and it's not bad. And Direkteur —"

"Yes."

“Ons twee het elkeen ’n loopbaan uit een begrafnis gemaak.” He picked his newspaper up off the bench and folded it under his arm. “Myne het net beter betaal.”

He said goodnight to Divan, and told Sifiso the beans had been a waste of everybody’s time, and walked off down the path towards the chalets with the very slightly wrong gait of a man whose hip is going, and did not look back once to see whether Motaung was still sitting there.

Motaung sat there.

Then he got up and walked the other way, down past the pool and the dead flower beds to the fence line above the road, and nobody came after him and nobody said anything into a radio, and about halfway there a lodge employee going the other way with a torch said good evening and asked him if he wanted a jacket because it came off the mountain cold after ten.

He said no thank you.

He stood at the fence and did the arithmetic, because it was the only thing he was for.

Eleven kilometres of dirt to the district road. Twenty-two more to the R560. There was a plate reader on the gantry at that junction and there was a second one at Hartbeespoort where the traffic came off the dam wall, and he knew there was, because the Directorate had co-funded eleven of those gantries in 2047 and he had signed the schedule of locations in a boardroom with a coffee in his hand. No card. No phone. Forty rand and some coins in his trouser pocket, and a briefcase, and a face that had been on the news at seven.

It was ten past nine on Friday night.

Row five unlocked at six o’clock on Sunday morning. That was fifty-six hours and change. The window shut at midnight on Monday, which was seventy-five.

He could walk out of the gate. Solly would lift the boom, because Solly had been told there was a guest in six and had not been told anything else, and would probably offer him a lift as far as the tar.

There was no lock on the door of chalet six because there had never been a lock on the door of chalet six. He was inside something with no walls at all, and it had taken nineteen years and about four hundred million rand a year to build, and he had specified the fence line himself in a document with a page number.

He went back up.

The room was warm and smelled of thatch. He sat on the end of the bed with the briefcase next to him and looked at the telephone on the table, a cream plastic thing with a card under the glass listing the extensions: RECEPTION 100. KITCHEN 104. CONFERENCE 1.

He picked it up. There was a tone.

There were three numbers he knew without looking at anything, and had known for twenty-two, thirty-four and eleven years respectively.

Cassim's ended a career, his or hers, in the time it took to say his name.

Miriam's he could not dial for reasons that had been sitting in his chest since Thursday night like something swallowed wrong.

He dialled nine, and then a zero, and then eight, and then two, and his hand stopped.

It stopped before he did. That was the part he would go over afterwards: that his thumb came off the key and stayed off it while he was still, as far as he could tell, intending to press it, and that for two or three seconds he sat in a thatched room in the Magaliesberg with a dial tone in his ear and no explanation available to him for why he was not making a telephone call to Dries Lombard.

He put the receiver down.

He sat with his hand still on it.

Then he took his shoes off, and put them side by side under the bed the way a guest does, and lay down on top of the covers in his clothes with the light on, because the door had no key in it and he did not want to be asleep in the dark in a place he could leave.

Outside, something in the beams shifted, and settled, and the francolin gave it up for the night.

The Case

Day Four — Saturday 7 November 2054

They had put a shirt out for him.

It was on the chair in his room when he woke, folded, with the pins taken out of it, pale blue, and it was the right size. Not close to the right size. The right size, in the collar and in the sleeve, which is two measurements, and a man does not have two of another man's measurements by accident.

He put it on. There was no argument to be made by standing in yesterday's shirt.

Outside his window a man was walking the length of the swimming pool with a net on a pole, lifting out jacaranda flowers one scoop at a time and shaking them off into a bucket. The Magaliesberg sat behind him with the light coming over it flat and already hot at ten to seven. Somewhere below the lodge a bakkie started, ran for a while, and went off down the gravel.

Twenty-three hours and ten minutes.

That was the whole of his thinking for the first minute of the day and it was in the form of a number. At six tomorrow morning the escalation ladder would open row five, and a Deputy Director would be asked to sign it, and Ayesha Cassim would sign it, because it was her signature to give and she had told him to his face that she would do her job. Then the system would stop looking for where he was and start looking at where he had been for ninety days, and it would find the shape, and it would put a chair in the place he had not sat down yet.

He could walk out of the front door. He had checked at half past five, the way you check, and it had opened onto a gravel apron and eight kilometres of district road, and he had shut it again, because a man in the six per cent does not spend the last day of it walking down a district road in the sun.

He went down to breakfast.

The dining room had been cleared. The long table under the window had nine box files on it, lever-arch, black, with printed spine labels, and a laptop, and two bound briefs in the sky-blue covers that counsel use, and a jug of water with the condensation already running.

Grobler was at the head of it in shirtsleeves, no jacket in sight, reading the sports pages of a newspaper that had come up the pass late.

“Direkteur. Sit. Daar’s koffie.” He folded the paper along its original folds, which almost nobody does. “You slept?”

“Some.”

“Nobody sleeps here the first two nights. Then they sleep like the dead and I lose the whole morning.”

At the far end of the table a woman was setting out page bundles in a sequence she had clearly worked out in a car. She was about thirty-three, in a black suit that had been bought for a courtroom and not for a lodge in November, and there was a rusk on her saucer that she kept moving and not eating. When she straightened up she had a plaster on the back of her heel.

“Advocate Yolisa Booï,” Grobler said. “She’s been on this file since she was a candidate attorney and she knows it better than the two silks who signed the opinions, and one day when she takes silk herself I’m going to send her a very expensive gift and she’s going to have to give it back.”

“Director,” Booï said.

“Advocate.”

“I drove up from Emmarentia this morning,” she said, as though this needed to be disclosed. “The bundles were in the boot with my son’s soccer kit, so I apologise in advance for the smell of the third file.”

He sat where the chair had been put for him, which was on the long side of the table, facing the window, with the light behind the files and not behind him. He noticed it and decided it was not deliberate and then decided that with these people there was no useful distinction.

“Ek gaan nou Engels praat,” Grobler said, “want sy neem notule, en ek wil hê alles wat ek vandag sê moet opgeteken wees.” He put both hands flat on the table. “Advocate. Take him through it.”

She started at two minutes past nine.

She did not begin with the Constitution, which he had expected, and which would have let him sit comfortably for half an hour. She began with a man in Vosloorus who had been named in 2047 on a two-of-three concurrence and whose attorney had gone to court eleven times in seven years to be told, each time correctly, that under section fourteen sub six the dissenting finding was sealed and would not be disclosed to the named person or their representative, and that his client was therefore obliged to answer a case whose contents he was not permitted to know.

“He is not asking to be released,” Booï said. “That’s the part everybody gets wrong when they hear this argument on the radio. He’s asking to see the paper that says he shouldn’t be where he is. That’s all. And the answer is no, and the answer will be no next year, and the reason the answer is no is that the Directorate has been advised, correctly, that if he sees it, then eleven thousand three hundred and forty-seven people can ask to see theirs.”

She turned a page.

“Section twelve. Freedom and security of the person, which includes the right not to be deprived of it arbitrarily or without just cause. Section thirty-three, administrative action that is lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair. Section thirty-five, which the State says doesn’t apply because this isn’t a criminal proceeding, and which we say is decorative if a man can be held for nineteen years by a process that calls itself administrative. And then thirty-six, the limitation clause, and this is where it dies, Director, because thirty-six asks whether there is a less restrictive means to achieve the purpose, and there obviously is. You could disclose the dissent to a security-cleared le-

gal representative under a non-publication order. It would cost you nothing operationally. You have never done it. You have never piloted it. There is no minute anywhere in nineteen years in which the Directorate considered it and decided against it, because the Directorate has never considered it at all."

"There's a memorandum from 2035," Motaung said.

"There is. It says the provision is interim and should be revisited within thirty-six months once the courts have settled the disclosure question." She did not look up. "The courts settled it in 2039 and the provision was not revisited. That's the whole of our case on the sealing regime and it takes about forty minutes with the authorities."

"You can stop," Motaung said.

She stopped.

"It's correct."

Nobody said anything. The man with the net went past the window with his bucket.

"I want to be clear about what I'm agreeing to," Motaung said, "because I'm going to be quoted. The sealing provision cannot survive section thirty-six. It could not have survived it in 2038. It has survived because nobody with standing and money has run it properly, and now somebody has. Your paragraph on the less-restrictive-means point is the one we have no answer to, and I know we have no answer to it because I have signed four answering affidavits in nine years and every one of them dealt with it by changing the subject."

Grobler looked at his watch. He did it without hurry and without hiding it.

"Four minutes," he said.

"Is that a long time or a short time?"

"Neels," Booi said quietly, in the tone of counsel heading off a client.

"No, no." Grobler was enjoying himself, and the appalling thing about it was that the enjoyment was professional and had nothing unkind in it. "Four minutes is a very short time, Director. I have sat across a table from three of your predecessors in other jobs, and from two ministers, and from a chief executive of an insurance company who

understood by the second week that he had signed something he shouldn't have, and the average is about eleven months." He turned to Booï. "Carry on. He'll want the rest."

"I'll want the rest," Motaung agreed. "Do the annual review."

She did the annual review, and this was the part that cost him, and it cost him in a way he had not budgeted for, which was that he already knew all of it.

Preventive custody is an indefinite order reviewed every twelve months by a designated magistrate. That is the safeguard. It is named as the safeguard in the Act's memorandum of objects, in the Directorate's annual report, and in two speeches Motaung had given, one of them to a law faculty.

Booï put up a page with a table on it.

"Designated preventive magistrate, Gauteng jurisdiction. Nine years in the post. Ninety thousand two hundred and something renewals, we're working off the annual reports so the last column is a range. Declined: none. Not one, Director. Not a single order in nine years has been found on review to be no longer justified." She let it stand for about as long as it deserved. "There are two possible readings. One is that ninety thousand consecutive findings were correct, which nobody in this room believes, including you. The other is that the review is not a review."

"It's the second one," Motaung said.

"You agree with that too."

"I agree with the arithmetic. I'd put it differently."

"Please."

"To decline a renewal, a magistrate must sign her name to the proposition that a finding was wrong. There is no procedure on this earth by which she can know that a finding was wrong. There is a very clear procedure by which she can find out that it was right, and it is to release someone and then read about what he did." He kept his voice where he kept it in meetings. "She is not lazy and she is not corrupt. I have met her twice. She is a careful person operating a

mechanism that only turns one way, and every one of those ninety thousand signatures is the rational act of a careful person.”

Booi wrote something down.

“May I use that?”

“It’s not mine to give you.”

“It’s on the record now,” Grobler said, and drank his coffee.

Motaung sat and looked at the table with the nine files on it and thought about Wednesday afternoon, at sixteen minutes past two, in Cassim’s office, when she had told him who the designated magistrate was and he had laughed. One syllable, flat, out of him before he could stop it. He had laughed because it was funny, in the way that a thing is funny when everybody in the room has been agreeing not to look at it for nine years, and because at that moment it was a fact about somebody else.

He had built the review in 2035. He had argued for a magistrate rather than an internal panel, against Treasury, against two of his own directors, and he had won that argument, and it had been the right argument, and it was the reason the Act got through the National Council. It had not declined a single order in nine years.

“Director?” Booi said.

“Carry on.”

At half past ten Grobler sent for more coffee and a plate of something, and while it was coming Motaung asked the question he had been holding since the door of the parkade.

“Who’s paying for this?”

“For the litigation.” Grobler put his cup down. “The Federation’s legal fund.”

“And who pays into the legal fund?”

“Twenty-two corporate members carry about eighty per cent of it. There’s a levy on the rest, fourteen thousand a year per member, which some of them cannot afford and pay anyway. The largest single contributor is an armoured-vehicle importer in Isando. The second

largest is a manned-guarding group with four thousand employees, which is a third of what it had in 2038.” He said all of this at the same speed he had said the thing about the coffee. “We have spent forty-seven million rand over nine years. Sy weet die syfer beter as ek.”

“Forty-seven point three,” Booi said.

“So the case is funded by the industry that the Directorate replaced.”

“Yes.”

“And if you win it, and every two-one warrant is set aside, what happens to that industry?”

Grobler considered this for a moment, and Motaung watched him and understood, with something close to admiration and nothing at all like relief, that the moment was not about whether to tell the truth. It was about finding the most accurate way to say it.

“It doubles,” Grobler said. “Inside eighteen months. Probably more than doubles, because the first thing that happens after seven thousand people go home is that everybody who can afford a contract signs a contract, and the people who can’t afford one don’t, and that is exactly the country we had in 2029 and I know precisely what it looks like because I ran the East Rand through it.” He turned his cup a quarter turn on the saucer. “Two hundred and forty thousand people worked in this industry. There are thirty-one thousand now. That is not a grievance I made up for an affidavit, and I’m not embarrassed by it, and if you’re waiting for me to be embarrassed by it we can sit here until Monday.”

“I’m not waiting for that.”

“Good. Because the case is still correct.” He said it without raising his voice. “That’s the part your communications office has never been able to get its head around. They keep briefing journalists that I’m doing this for money, and I am doing this for money, and it doesn’t touch a single paragraph of what she just read to you.”

“No,” Motaung said. “It doesn’t.”

The plate came. It was sandwiches, cut small, and nobody ate any of them for a while.

"I'll say the other half," Grobler said, "so that you don't have to say it and then feel that you've been made to defend yourself in a room where you're outnumbered. Murder in this province is at the lowest level since 1908. I'm not going to sit here and tell you it doesn't work. It works. It is the single most effective thing this country has done since I was born." He put a sandwich on a side plate and did not eat it either. "In four years I buried eleven of my own people. I have a daughter in Benoni who parks her car and walks eleven metres to her own front door at night and does not phone anybody first, and I know what that cost and I know who paid for it and I want my industry back. All of it at once, Direkteur. I don't have a version of myself where those are separate."

At about eleven he pulled the fourth file across the table without getting up.

"Do you want to see something?"

"No," Motaung said.

Grobler laughed, opened it anyway, and turned it round.

It was a photostat of an annexure to a portfolio committee submission, the paper grey where it had been copied from a copy. Technical specification, apprehension performance, outstanding executions. Draft three. November 2036.

"Read it to him," Grobler said.

"General—"

"Read it. Ek wil hê hy moet dit uit iemand anders se mond hoor."

Booi read it, and she read it well, because she was a person who read documents aloud for a living and had long ago stopped putting any colour into them at all.

"Target apprehension rate for outstanding executions shall be set at ninety-four per cent within forty-eight hours. The specification does not adopt a higher target. A system that apprehends every subject, every time, within the hour, is not a policing system. It is a country nobody wants to live in. The final four per cent is where the whole of

the cost and the whole of the tyranny live, and the Directorate does not propose to go and get it.”

She put the page down.

“Eighteen years old,” Grobler said. “It’s a public document. Anybody can pull it. I’ve had it in that file since 2046 and I have read it more times than you have.” He tapped the table twice, lightly, next to the page. “I have spent ten years trying to take your machine apart, Director, and I have never once tried to take you apart, and that paragraph is the reason. A man who writes that sentence into a specification and gets Treasury to sign it is not what I was told he was. I have quoted it in two speeches. I quoted it at the congress in 2051 and got no applause at all, which pleased me.”

Motaung sat very still and found that his hands were flat on the table and that he had put them there without deciding to.

Nineteen years of hostile cross-examination, portfolio committees, two commissions of inquiry, a journalist who had followed him for four months in 2044, and none of it had done what this did. He had been called an architect of detention without trial by a man whose father had been detained without trial, in public, on a stage in Braamfontein, and had answered it standing up and slept fine.

He got up and went to the window.

The man with the net was gone. The pool was clean. There was a woman sitting on the low wall at the end of it with her shoes off, on her phone, laughing at something.

“You’ve read the rest of the specification,” he said.

“I’ve read all of it.”

“Then you know the sentence after that one. It says the final four per cent is where the money and the tyranny live.” He turned round. “I’m in it. I’ve been in it since half past four on Wednesday afternoon. It’s the most humane thing I ever wrote and I’m currently living inside it, and it expires at six tomorrow morning, at which point a piece of paper I insisted should require a Deputy Director’s signature gets a Deputy Director’s signature.”

“Yes,” Grobler said. “We know about row five.”

"Everyone knows about row five. It's in the training module."

"That's what I told them."

It came back to the number at about half past twelve, the way he had known it would from the moment Booï said it in the first five minutes, because it was the only thing on the table with weight.

"Eleven thousand three hundred and forty-seven residents at Doringkop as of the end of October," Booï said. "We have the population figure from the annual report and the composition from a written reply to a parliamentary question in March. Of those, our model puts the number held on a two-of-three concurrence at seven thousand and eighty-one. Sixty-two point four per cent, and our confidence interval on that is plus or minus one point one."

"One point one," Motaung said.

"Yes."

"On a population you have never had access to."

"On the reply to the parliamentary question, and the 2049 to 2053 admissions series, and a Poisson fit that Advocate Reddy's junior did and that I have checked twice." Booï did not blink. "It's a good model, Director. I'd defend it in front of a full bench."

He believed her. That was not the difficulty.

"Seven thousand people," Grobler said, "held under warrants that have been void since 2049, and I will prove that part when we amplify, and when I do, every one of those orders falls, and they go home. I want you to hear the sentence properly. They go home. Not released on a technicality with an apology from a spokesman. The order was never lawfully made, so there was never an order, so there is nothing to release them from."

"How many of them would have done it?"

"I don't know."

"Take a guess."

"No," Grobler said. "I'm not going to. That's your machine's question and I've never once been able to make it mean anything."

"Then let me put it to you as an operational matter." Motaung came back to the table but did not sit down. "Seven thousand orders fall in eighteen months. Among them is some number of people about whom the finding was correct, and neither you nor I nor anybody living can say what that number is, and the only way anyone will ever find out is by reading their names in the paper afterwards. That is not an argument against you. Your case is still correct. I want it on the note that I'm not offering it as an argument."

Booi's hands had stopped over the keyboard.

"It's on the note," she said.

"Have you been there?"

Grobler looked up.

"To Doringkop."

"No," Grobler said.

He did not say that he had applied for a visitor's permit, or that the Federation had been refused access in 2050, or any of the four things a lesser man would have had ready.

"It's an hour and forty minutes from here," Motaung said. "You go out past Delmas and the country goes flat and then there's a fence. I signed the specification for the fence. It's two point four metres and it's not electrified, because at three metres and electrified it photographs as a prison and at two point four with a mesh infill it photographs as a school. That was a real conversation and it took a whole morning." He looked at the nine files. "There's a clinic. It has a dialysis chair and two full-time sisters and it is the reason a man in Block C is alive. I paid for it in 2046 by taking continuous pedestrian camera capture out of the budget, which is a decision I have defended in front of an audit committee, and which is the sole reason I was able to walk four blocks down Vermeulen on Wednesday afternoon without being seen."

Nobody said anything.

"You have the number to a decimal place," he said. "You've never seen the fence."

Grobler took that. He took it the way a man takes a hit he has already priced.

“No,” he said. “And you have seen the fence every year since it went up, and you signed the renewals, and here we are, so I don’t think either of us gets very much out of that particular line of argument.”

Which was, Motaung thought, entirely fair.

They broke at one. Booï began putting the page bundles back in the order she had brought them in, which was a different order from the one she had used, and she did it as carefully as she had done everything else.

At the door Grobler said, “The concurrence limb is thin. You know that. Your own legal people told you that on Wednesday morning and they were right.”

“They were.”

“We’ll amplify. That’s a word that means we do not yet have the thing that proves it.” He was leaning against the doorframe with his hands in his pockets, entirely at ease, sixty-eight years old, in shirtsleeves. “What would end it in one morning is a single sealed dissent read out in public, on a finding the country cannot file away, with a name on it that gets it onto the news at seven. Not a statistic. One piece of paper and one name.”

He said it the way a man puts a set of keys down on a hall table on his way past. He did not ask for anything. He did not look at Motaung for longer than was ordinary, and then he went off down the passage to see about lunch, and somewhere behind the kitchen a screen door went twice.

Motaung stood in the dining room with the light coming off the water outside.

At 09:40 on Wednesday morning, eleven metres under Struben Street, a Reader had looked at his name and filed a dissent, and at twelve o’clock the Registrar of Findings had sealed it under section fourteen sub six, and at 12:14 his own request to see it had come back auto-declined under sub-paragraph (c), *irrespective of that*

person's office, which he had drafted himself at eleven at night in the spring of 2035.

There was a piece of paper. It had his name on it.

He began, out of nineteen years of habit, to draft the Directorate's answering affidavit in his head. He got as far as the third line of the section thirty-six analysis, which was the line where you say what the less restrictive means would have cost, and he stopped, and stood there, and could not go on, because there was no figure to put in it and there never had been.

Booi came past with the fourth file under her arm.

"Advocate. What's the time?"

She looked at her phone.

"Twenty to two, Director."

Sixteen hours and twenty minutes.

"Thank you," he said, and went out to the stoep to wait for lunch.

How to Farm a Finding

Day Four — Saturday 7 November 2054, after dark

The generator changed note at eight, which meant the pump had come on, which meant a borehole somewhere under the hill was filling a tank for eleven guests who were not there. Moths worked the gauze of the stoep door in their hundreds. The Magaliesberg had gone the colour of a bruise an hour ago and there was rain somewhere north of Brits that was not going to arrive.

Elsie brought the salad out and told Grobler the beans were finished and it was his own fault for not saying how many. She had worked here since it was a farm and she cleared the lever-arch files off the end of the table without asking which pile was which, and got them all right.

Motaung ate because a man who has not eaten makes the decision he is frightened of.

At six the next morning, row five unlocked. He had been carrying the number since Wednesday night the way you carry a stone in a shoe you cannot stop to take off: ten hours, and then a full behavioural retrospective, ninety days, and then a chair placed where he was going to sit down. Cassim's signature was the only thing between him and it. He had spent three days certain she was the one who had done this to him, and he was going to have to do something about that, and not tonight.

Grobler came back from the kitchen in his shirtsleeves with a folder that was not a lever-arch file. It was a manila one, thin, the kind a man carries when he has taken four things out of a big thing.

He put it on the table next to the salad and did not open it.

“Ek wil eers iets sê in Afrikaans,” he said, “en dan sê ek dit weer in Engels, sodat jy my kan aanhaal.”

“Say it in English the first time.”

“No.” Grobler sat down. He was sixty-eight and he sat like a man whose back had been in a bakkie for forty years. “Ons het niks geplant nie.”

“Nothing was planted.”

“Nothing was planted,” Grobler said. “We didn’t put a single false thing in front of your machine. Not a document, not a witness, not a rand. I want that clear before I open this, because when I open it you’re going to want it to be the other thing, and it isn’t.”

“Then what is it.”

“Inputs,” Grobler said.

He opened the folder and laid four items on the table, squarely, one below the other, the way a man lays out a hand he is not enjoying.

The first was a photocopy of a page from *Sector Brief*, the trade newsletter that went to every security company in the country and to about four hundred civil servants who read it in the toilet. September issue. A standing column near the back called Watch List, which had run for eleven years and which named the regulators, magistrates and officials the industry considered obstructive that quarter.

Fourth entry: *Director J.T. Motaung (Waverley)*.

Motaung remembered it. He remembered being irritated for about a morning, and remembered Sibanda saying they could write to the editor and him saying don’t, because writing to the editor about a watch list puts you on the watch list twice.

“The suburb,” he said.

“The suburb.”

“That’s not journalism.”

“No,” Grobler agreed. “It’s a subscription list of four thousand people, and the Directorate’s media monitoring is on it, because I checked

in 2046 when I still had a company to run. Your own building read that page. Your own building filed it.”

The second item was a court process. A Federation-funded litigant, a fencing contractor in Boksburg whose tender had gone the way tenders go, had sued the Directorate in October over a procurement decision, and the sheriff had served the papers not on the Directorate’s registered address in Struben Street but on Josiah Thabo Motaung personally, at a house in Waverley, on a Saturday morning at twenty past nine.

“There’s no advantage in that,” Motaung said. “Legally there’s nothing in it. You cite the accounting officer, you serve at the seat. Your attorneys know that.”

“Ja. There’s no legal advantage.”

“Then why.”

“Because a man who is served at his own front door on a Saturday tells somebody about it,” Grobler said. “In writing. Within a day. You wrote to your legal adviser. I’ve never seen it and I don’t want to see it. I didn’t need to. You’ve written a memo about every irritating thing that has happened to you since 1994.”

Four lines to Sibanda, on the Sunday. *Please establish why service was effected on me personally and whether the Federation’s attorneys instructed it.* He could see the sentence. He had been quite pleased with it.

The third item Grobler put down more slowly.

It was a printout of a message, seventeen words, routed to the Directorate’s public intake in the third week of October from a number that had been bought at a spaza in Mamelodi and used four times. It named Miriam Motaung. It named the level of the parkade she used and the two-hour window in which she used it. The last four words attached a name to itself, which no real threat ever does, and the name was Grobler’s.

Motaung’s hand had gone flat on the table beside the paper. He was aware of it the way he was aware of things.

“Nobody was ever going to touch your wife,” Grobler said.

"You don't get to know that."

"No," Grobler said. "That's fair."

"There's an offence in that. That is the one offence on this table." Motaung's voice had not changed at all, and he heard it not change, and it was the voice he used for budgets. "Section four of the Intimidation Act, and a common-law one behind it, and I can't put it on you, and you knew that in October when you did it."

"I did."

"What did you do about her parking?" Grobler said, after a moment. "Did you tell her?"

Motaung had gone to facilities on the Monday and had the Registrar's bay moved to level one and the access plate reissued and a camera brought forward eight metres, and he had signed it himself instead of routing it, because routing it would have made it a matter, and he had gone home that night and eaten a fish pie and said nothing.

He did not answer.

"There it is," Grobler said, without any pleasure whatsoever. "That's the one that did the work. A named threat against a spouse, logged by your own internal security, with a file number, in your own system, which trusts itself above every other source on earth. Grievance with a direction on it. I didn't have to make you angry. I only had to make it *recorded* that you had somewhere to put it."

The fourth item was the Federation's chairman's diary.

They published it quarterly on the website, four pages, engagements and hosts and dates, because a lobbying body that appears before a portfolio committee twice a year publishes its chairman's diary; it had been a compliance undertaking since 2044 and it was the dullest document Grobler produced.

He had marked it. A school fundraiser in Waverley in March. A golf day at a club on Lynnwood Road, the one Motaung passed on Wednesday mornings when he took the long way in because the Simon Vermooten robots were being rebuilt. A security expo at a hall four hundred metres from the Directorate's parking, twice. A funeral in Silverton in June for a man they had both known slightly and neither of

them mentioned to the other afterwards, because they had not spoken; because they had been ninety metres apart for forty minutes in the same tent and had not spoken.

Fourteen months of it. Never in a room. Never introduced. Never on the same platform, never on the same call, never once, not by accident, because it had not been an accident.

“Proximity,” Motaung said.

“Proximity.”

“And means you didn’t touch.”

“Means I couldn’t have arranged if I’d wanted to,” Grobler said. “You’re a police officer of thirty-five years with a licensed Z88 in a safe in your office and a competency certificate renewed in March. Your machine has never had to wonder whether you could. Nobody in this country with your service record has ever generated a means score worth reading.”

Motaung looked at the four items on the table and saw, without wanting to, the thing underneath them, which was not any of the four.

September a year ago, the diary. March, the school hall in Waverley. June, ninety metres in a tent in Silverton. September, the suburb in print. October, the sheriff at his door on a Saturday. Three weeks later, his wife’s parking bay in seventeen words with a name attached.

Rising. Tightening. Fourteen months of it, and each interval shorter than the one before, and the last two inside a month.

He had specified that shape. Not the events; the shape. In a room in 2037 with van Wyk’s predecessor and a statistician from Wits, he had insisted that the instrument weight *acceleration* over volume, because the thing they were trying to find was not a man with a grievance, it was a man with a grievance that was getting shorter, and every docket he had ever worked in Katlehong had that curve in it if you were willing to plot it. It was the single most defensible thing in the whole architecture. It was the paragraph he used when a committee asked why this was not just a list of poor men.

“You gave it a curve,” he said.

“I gave it four true things in an order.”

"That is a curve. That is the curve."

He went through it again with a pen. He asked for a pen and Elsie found one and he went through the four items the way he had gone through eleven thousand packets, and he was looking for the crime, because that is what thirty-five years does to a man.

A newsletter may print a name and a suburb. A litigant may choose whom to serve and a sheriff will serve where he is instructed. A lobbying body must publish its chairman's diary and a chairman may attend a school fundraiser in any suburb in the Republic. The third item was a crime and the third item ran to a dead SIM through a spaza till in Mamelodi and there was nothing at the end of it and there never would be.

Each one lawful. Each one true. Not a false statement anywhere in the whole fourteen months.

"Who ran it?"

"Four people. Two of them are attorneys and one of them is dead, which was not us, he was seventy-nine."

"And in my building."

Grobler looked at him.

"You know I'm not going to answer that."

"No," Motaung said.

He filed it, in the room at the back of his head where three small objections had been sitting since Wednesday afternoon not talking to each other, and now there were four, and the fourth one had a shape and no face.

"The window," he said. "Six days. It shuts Monday at midnight and your congress opens Monday at nine, and the escalation ladder puts row five on Sunday morning, which leaves exactly one working morning between them. Somebody read the Benoni minutes."

"Somebody read the Benoni minutes in 2049," Grobler said. "They were an annexure to the review. My attorneys have a warehouse in

Midrand with three thousand boxes in it and everything your Directorate has ever put in front of a committee is in there, indexed, by two women who are very good at their jobs.” He turned his glass a quarter turn. “But we didn’t draw the window, Josiah. Nobody draws the window. Your machine drew it. We wanted a thing before the congress and we’d have taken a thing in March, and if it had come in March I’d be doing this in a different lodge.”

“Then the fit is a coincidence.”

“The fit is that the ladder and the window were written four years apart by the same eleven people in the same building out of the same arithmetic,” Grobler said. “Of course they fit. It’s the same wood.”

That was true. He knew it was true within about two seconds, which was the second-fastest he had ever agreed with anybody, and he had spent Wednesday night on the bench seat of a scrapped Quantum believing it was the signature of an enemy, and it was joinery.

“And you didn’t know what it would say.”

“We didn’t know anything it would say.” Grobler put both hands flat on the table. “I’ll tell you what we wanted, and it’s smaller than you think. We wanted the Director of Preventive Enforcement to appear inside his own instrument. Anything. A threat assessment. A firearm review. A yellow flag on a quarterly. One line in one system with your name on the wrong side of it, so that when I stand up on Monday and say the instrument cannot be answered, there is a man in the room who cannot answer it and who built it.”

“And instead.”

“Instead it came back homicide,” Grobler said, “and the anticipated victim was me.”

The generator ran. Out past the gauze something small went through the dry grass and stopped.

“You read that on a Tuesday,” Motaung said.

“Wednesday. And I sat with it for about an hour and then I phoned the two attorneys and told them we were proceeding.” He said it flatly, a man reading back a minute. “I’m sixty-eight. I buried eleven of my own people on the East Rand and I’ve got a case that four silks

say is unanswerable, and thirty-one thousand jobs where there were two hundred and forty. If I stop because a machine says a man is going to shoot me, then the machine governs me too, and then what exactly have I been doing for ten years.”

“So it’s manufactured,” Motaung said.

“No.”

“Every input on this table is yours.”

“Every input on this table is *true*,” Grobler said. “That’s the part I can’t get past and I’ve had fourteen months. We didn’t forge the newsletter. We didn’t invent the litigation, the man’s tender was genuinely stolen from him. The diary is the diary. Your wife’s name in October was ours and it was a filthy thing and I did it, and the file it made in your building is a *real* file about a *real* thing that happened to you.”

“You arranged for a machine to be shown a man it would name.”

“I arranged for it to be shown things that were happening,” Grobler said. “It named the man.”

He stood up and went and got the bottle off the sideboard and came back and did not pour anything.

“I’ve been trying to write a sentence for fourteen months and I can’t write it. If I put four true facts in front of your instrument in the right order, and it computes a man out of them, and the man it computes would in fact do the thing — did I make that, or did I find it?”

“You made it.”

“Then tell me which of the four is false.”

Motaung did not answer, because none of them was false, and he had gone through them with a pen.

“You built it to find the slow kind,” Grobler said. “The kind that announces itself for months. That’s your line, I’ve read the 2036 specification, it’s a good line. Well. Something announced itself for fourteen months and your machine heard it, and the reason it heard it is that it was *there*.” He put the bottle down. “So no. I don’t know whether

the finding is wrong. I did what I did and I'll answer for it in front of anybody, and I still don't know."

"You're asking me."

"I'm not asking you anything. I'm telling you I don't know, and I'm telling you that you don't know either." Grobler looked at him with something that was not unkind and was not sympathy. "And neither does that woman in the basement who signed it at four in the morning. She'll never be told. That's in your statute. That's your clause."

PRIOR CONTACT: None of record.

It had been true. That was the thing that had come up under his hand three or four times in the last minute like a stone in a ploughed field. The line was not a lie and had never been a lie. Fourteen months of a man arranging himself into Josiah Motaung's record without once arranging himself into a room with him, and every field on that packet had been completed correctly by a stack doing exactly what it was designed to do, and the one field that any layman in the country would have read as innocent was the field that had convicted him, and he had written the guidance note that said so. In 2039. On a Tuesday. Two and a half pages. It was still the guidance note. Four intakes of officers had been taught to read that line the way he had just been read by it.

And underneath that, arriving without being sent for, the other thing.

He had written the white paper himself in the winter of 2035, at a desk in a borrowed office in the old Public Works building, and he had put the honest part in early on purpose, because he had believed then that a thing built in the open could not become the other kind of thing. It was the fourth paragraph. It went into the founding document and into the induction pack and it was on a laminated card in the pocket of a sergeant in Kempton Park at four o'clock on Tuesday morning, and Josiah Motaung had said it out loud in public perhaps a hundred times, with something close to pride, as evidence that the people who built this had been awake.

He sat at a table in the Magaliesberg with four true documents in front of him and understood, for the first time in nineteen years, that he had written it about himself.

THE NAMED

MAHLANGU, Ephraim Sipho

M 3

Night packer, bakery distribution depot, Isando.

NAMED 02 August 2049. Concurrence 3 of 3. No dissent

ANTICIPATED SEBOTSANE, Petrus Kagiso (co-tenant of the subje

RESIDENT Doringkop Preventive Estate, Block F, from 07 Au

ORDER REVIEWED 2050 (renewed) · 2051 (renewed) · 2052 (renewed)
2053 (renewed) · 2054 (renewed).

EMPLOYMENT Estate bakery, from Nov 2049. Satisfactory.

VISITS Logged 4 of 108 eligible.

CORRESPONDENCE 41 written representations to the Registrar of F
2050-2054. All acknowledged. All refused under s

NEXT REVIEW March 2055.

Grobler went to bed at half past ten. He said goodnight in Afrikaans and said the rain would come round the back of the mountain and miss them, and it did.

Motaung stayed at the table.

He had been given, in the space of four hours, everything a named man is supposed to want. He had the frame and he had the men who built it and he had four documents with their fingerprints on them, and if he stood up in a court on Tuesday with all of it, any silk in the country would take it and thank him for it, and not one of the four would be excluded, and not one of the four would help. Because the finding did not say *a conspiracy caused this man to be dangerous*. The finding said *this man will discharge a firearm at Cornelius Johannes Grobler before midnight on Monday*. Those two sentences did not touch anywhere. There was no procedure on earth, no court, no review, no clause he could have drafted at eleven o'clock at night in 2035, that took a farmed input on one side and a true finding on the other and separated them.

Somebody had read the overnight board at six o'clock that morning in his chair, and he did not know what it had said, for the fourth day running. Two, probably. It had been two on Wednesday. In 2029 this province had buried thirty-one in a single day and there had been a week in February of that year when Katlehong station ran out of

docket covers and used exam pads. Both of those facts were his. And eleven thousand three hundred and forty-seven people were asleep tonight out past Delmas in decent rooms with a soccer field and a library, named on the same arithmetic that a man in shirtsleeves had just run on him over a salad, and an unknowable number of them had been going to do it, and nobody would ever be able to say which, and that was his too.

He had built a machine that could not be lied to. It had never occurred to him, not once, in nineteen years, that this was the vulnerability.

The generator cut at ten to eleven and the lodge went to the small quiet of a house that runs on a battery after that, and the moths gave up on the gauze and started on the security light out by the gate. It was seven hours to six o'clock.

He reached across the table and took the photocopy from *Sector Brief* — the September page, the Watch List, the fourth entry, his own name and the suburb where his wife parked her car — and folded it once, and put it in his briefcase, where the old cardboard docket was.

Then he closed the briefcase and went out to stand on the stoep in the dark, because the room had a bed in it and he was not going to use it yet.

Fourteen Months

*Day One again — Wednesday 4 November 2054, 08:00–09:40.
Suite B.*

Wynand Loots came down to the basement at seven fifty-two, which was eight minutes early, which was not a virtue. It was the interval that made the lift arrive empty.

Two cards at the airlock, one for the outer door and one for the inner, and the inner would not read until the outer had shut and shown green. He had done it something over four thousand times. The mechanism took nine seconds and there was no way to make it take fewer, and in nine seconds a man standing in a steel box between two doors could get through a surprising amount of himself.

Suite B was three point four metres by two point nine. He knew that because the specification had been attached to a maintenance notice in 2047 and he had read it. One desk, bolted. One terminal, three panels. One chair whose height adjustment had failed in the autumn and now sat two centimetres lower than a chair should, so that he worked with his wrists slightly raised. The requisition for a replacement was reference FM/22-0114, submitted in March, status *with procurement*. He checked it on the first Monday of every month. It was a small thing to do that was not the work.

One kettle, issue equipment, because a Reader does not leave a suite with a file open and the files take what they take. He filled it to the line, switched it on, and stood while it went, because there was nowhere in the room to stand where he was not near it.

The headache had started at about ten to eight, left side, behind and slightly above the eye. He entered it in the log before he sat down.

Occupational Health had asked him in 2050 to keep a record, and had stopped asking to see it in 2051, and he had gone on keeping it, in a spreadsheet with a column for onset, a column for site, and a column for a number out of ten. Grade two. It was almost always grade two at the start.

Rooibos, one bag, no sugar. He had come off coffee in 2050 for reasons that were in the log.

At eight the stack refreshed.

The queue came up as it always came up, an ordered list with the reference, the time of first assessment, and nothing else. Nine items. He was the second assessment on all nine, which was the ordinary shape of a Wednesday. He never chose. The scheduler ordered them by the time of first assessment and he took them from the top, because taking them in any other order would be a decision about which one mattered, and a decision like that is a fact about the Reader and it goes into the finding whether he wants it to or not. That was module two. He had believed module two for eighteen years without ever quite being able to say why.

SUITE B - SECOND ASSESSMENT QUEUE		04 Nov 2054	08:00
1.	GP/2054/11-0883	first assessment	04:11
2.	GP/2054/11-0884	first assessment	05:02
...			

He opened 0883 at four minutes past eight.

What arrived on his screen was not a prediction and he had never once heard anyone in the building call it one. It was a subject record, a behavioural forecast over a stated horizon, a salience ranking, and the extracts the ranking was built out of. Left panel, the record. Centre panel, the forecast. Right panel, the extracts, which most Readers opened last, because the ranking told you where to look and reading the extracts first cost you forty minutes a file.

He read the extracts first. He had read the extracts first since 2050. It was in his file as a productivity observation and he had never been instructed to stop.

MOTAUNG, Josiah Thabo. Sixty-one. Male. Grade fifteen, national department, nineteen years, no disciplinary record. One licensed firearm, competency current, renewed on time in March. Married

thirty-four years. A bond, thirteen years paid. A twelve-year-old Toyota and a service vehicle he had declined in 2049 and declined again in 2052. Two consultations with a general practitioner in the last four years, both for the same shoulder.

The suites did not get titles or employers by name. An audit in 2038 had found that Readers were measurably slower to find intent formed where the subject's record carried a rank or a designation, and had recommended that status fields be stripped at ingest. Wynand had read the audit. It was a good audit. He had no view about the man's job beyond the fact that he had kept it for nineteen years, which was itself a feature, and which the stack weighted, and which he was not obliged to think about.

Anticipated victim: GROBLER, Cornelius Johannes, sixty-eight. Window six days, expiring midnight on Monday the ninth.

Prior contact: none of record.

He sat with that line the way everyone sat with that line. There was a guidance note about it, an old one, and every intake got taught it: absence of contact is not absence of relation. He had assessed eleven files in his career where prior contact was none of record and in nine of them the record had been so loud in every other direction that the line was a formality. He did not know what had happened in any of the eleven. He would not be told. That was the arrangement, and it had been explained to him in a room in Bloemfontein in 2036 by a woman with a folder, and he had signed.

The kettle clicked off behind him. He let it stand.

The salience ranking gave him eight items above the reporting threshold. He worked down them with the extracts open alongside, which was the slow way, and by twenty past eight he had made a mark on his pad next to each one, and by half past he had stopped making marks and was looking at the pad.

Item one was a circular. A security-industry newsletter, subscriber list of about three and a half thousand, published in September, carrying a list of eleven officials under the heading *Who is doing this to us*. The subject was fourth on it. The entry gave his suburb.

Item two was a return of service. A litigant funded by an industry body had served papers on the subject in October at his home ad-

dress, personally, at twenty past six in the evening, rather than at the department, which was where papers of that kind went and where they would have been accepted without argument.

Item three was a threat. Routed through a prepaid number, received in October, directed at the subject's wife by name, with the anticipated victim's name attached to it in the body of the message. It had been logged. The Directorate logged everything.

Item four was a diary. The anticipated victim's movements had been made public, by the anticipated victim's own organisation, in the ordinary course of what that organisation did, and over the preceding fourteen months those movements had put him within a kilometre of the subject's routine on eleven occasions. Neither man appeared to have known.

Items five through eight were smaller and were the same shape.

Wynand put his pen down and drank the rooibos, which had gone from too hot to nearly right in the time it had taken him to read four documents, and he thought about the shape.

The stack was not wrong. That was the first thing to be clear about with himself, because a Reader who starts from the stack being wrong is a Reader who is finished, and there was a name for that in module four and it was not a kind name. The features were real. Grievance was there, and means was there, and proximity was there, and the escalation curve was there and it was steep. He had signed on less. He had signed in 2051 on a man in Tembisa with three protection orders and a pattern that any constable could have read off the page, and he had been certain, and he would be certain again, and he would never know.

But.

He went back to the top of the ranking and did the thing he did not have a name for and had never seen described in any of the six modules.

He asked, of each of the eight items: who moved.

The circular was written by somebody else. The papers were served by somebody else, at the door, in the evening, in a manner with no advantage to the person serving them. The threat was sent by some-

body else and carried the victim's name into the subject's record without the subject doing anything at all except be at his desk when it was routed there. The diary was published by somebody else. The eleven proximities were generated by a man driving to functions in Sandton and Benoni and Vereeniging with no idea that a stranger was doing his shopping half a kilometre away.

Everything the machine had found loud, somebody else had done.

He looked for what the subject had done. In fourteen months the subject had gone to work at an hour that did not vary by more than nine minutes. He had renewed a vehicle licence. He had answered an attorney's letter within four days, which the record noted because response latency was a feature. He had bought diesel at the same two garages. He had not looked anybody up. He had not driven anywhere he did not drive. He had not bought a thing he did not buy every month. His firearm had been out of the safe twice in four years, both times at a range, both times logged, both times on the day before a competency renewal, which was the least interesting reason a man ever takes a firearm to a range.

The pattern on the screen was a man with a wall coming towards him.

It was not the same shape as a man walking at somebody.

Wynand sat with his wrists slightly raised because of the chair, and tried to put that into a sentence that would survive being read by somebody else, and could not.

The trouble was that it was not an objection. There were four exclusions and he could recite all four, and this was not any of them. It was not identity error. It was not a data-integrity flag. It was not an exclusion under the medical schedule. It was not a coverage gap. The features were correctly extracted, correctly weighted, and correctly ranked, and the forecast was properly formed on them. There was no fault in the file. If he had been asked to point at the fault he would have had to say that the file was composed almost entirely of other people, and then the person asking would have said yes, and, and he would have had nothing to put after the and.

At eight forty-seven he opened the forecast panel and read the six-day projection properly, line by line, instead of taking the summary.

The projection did not have the subject approaching anybody. It had

discontinuity: a break in an eighteen-year routine, movement out of pattern, withdrawal from a covered estate, a drop in transactional footprint to almost nothing inside seventy-two hours. It had a man going away from where he was known. Whatever else the six days held, on the stack's own numbers they held a man leaving.

Wynand did not ask himself why the forecast said that. It was not a question a Reader was equipped for and there was no field in which to put an answer. The stack computed and he read what it computed.

The headache moved up to a four. He noted it.

At four minutes past nine he stood up because his back required it, and stood in the ninety centimetres between the desk and the wall, and drank the rest of the rooibos cold.

Then he sat down and did the part that was his.

The stack could not answer the intent question. It had never been built to and the statute was explicit about it, and the whole of Suite B, the airlock and the kettle and the chair and the eighteen years, existed because somebody in 2035 had insisted that a human being had to sign before the Republic took a man out of his house. The stack gave him a behavioural forecast and a confidence band and eight ranked items. It could not say whether intent had *formed*. That was the word in the section: formation. Not capability. Not opportunity. Not risk. Whether, in this particular man, on this particular Wednesday, the thing had gone from being a shape in the data to being a decision inside a person.

Wynand had never met anybody who could explain how a Reader did that. He had asked, once, in 2039, at the only training event Readers were ever brought to, and a psychologist had used the phrase *integrative judgement* and he had written it down and looked at it for a year.

What he actually did was hold the whole file at once and ask whether the man in it had turned.

He read it again from the top. It took nineteen minutes.

The man in the file had not turned. The man in the file had been walked at, published about, served at his own front door in the evening, and told through a stranger's phone what somebody might

do to his wife, and had gone on going to work at the same time and buying diesel at the same two garages. Everything sharp in the record pointed inward at him. Nothing pointed out.

At twenty-eight minutes past nine Wynand Loots put the cursor in the finding pane.

There were two selections and a free-text field. The first selection was intent formation, and it offered *assessed complete* or *assessed absent*, and the second was concurrence, which the system filled in for you afterwards and which no Reader ever saw resolved.

His hand stayed on the mouse.

The last time he had marked *absent* was the second of September 2053, a Tuesday. Fourteen months and two days. He knew the date without going to look, and he could have named the reference too, and had never told anyone he could.

He knew what was in his file. Human Resources had sent him the wrong attachment in 2052, an annual review that should have gone to a manager, and he had opened it because it had his surname on it, and had read the calibration paragraph twice and closed it and never mentioned it to anybody. Reader B's dissent rate had continued to improve. That was the word. It was not a cruel word. Somebody in an office had needed a word for a number going down and had reached for the ordinary one, and had probably been pleased for him.

He thought about the nineteen-year-old for perhaps four seconds, which was the arrangement he had come to with that, and which cost him about four seconds every time.

Then he clicked *assessed absent*, and the finding pane opened, and he wrote what the file supported and nothing else. That the subject would not cause the death of the named person. That the subject would remove himself from the window and would not be within reach of the named person at any point during it. He chose *remove himself* over three other constructions because the forecast said leaving and did not say why, and a Reader who writes more than the forecast carries is writing about himself.

Then the note field.

He typed: *The salience in this file is composed almost entirely of*

acts performed upon the subject by others. I am not able to say that this is an error. I am asking that somebody look at the direction of it.

He read it back.

It read like a man with an opinion about the Directorate, and he did not have one, and had not been asked for one, and a note like that on a file was not a technical observation, it was a Reader's state of mind, and a Reader's state of mind went into a file and stayed in it and was quoted in a calibration paragraph four years later by somebody being fair to him.

He deleted it a word at a time, which took longer than typing it, and left the field as the system left it when nobody wrote anything.

READER'S NOTE: None.

He submitted at nine forty.

The screen did what it did. It returned the registry reference with a B on the end of it, and the queue advanced, and item two of nine came up with its time of first assessment at 05:02, and a green bar sat at the top of the pane for four seconds and went away.

Nothing else happened. Nothing else had ever happened. He was not told where it went and would not be told, not that day and not in twenty years, and there was no channel through which anyone would tell him, and if he had wanted to ask he would have had to submit a request on a form, and he had read about the form.

He wrote 09:40 — 0883 *filed* in the shift log, and the time of onset had been 07:52, and he entered a six in the headache column, which he almost never did.

Then he closed item two without opening it, and took his cards, and stood the nine seconds in the airlock.

The canteen on the ground floor did nothing hot before eleven, but the urn was on and there were the previous day's koeksisters under a plastic dome, and a woman in a green overall was wiping the tables from the far end towards the window.

Wynand stood with his tray and waited until she had finished the table in front of him rather than walk on the part of the floor she had done.

“Sorry,” he said. “Sorry to bother you. Do the toasted sandwiches start at eleven, or half past?”

“Eleven.”

“Thank you. I’ll come back at eleven, then.”

He took the coffee he was not supposed to drink and sat where he could see the clock, and ate a koeksister that had been made on Tuesday, and at nine past ten the two women from Finance came in talking about a parking bay, and the building went on above him for six floors, and none of them knew, and he did not tell anybody, then or afterwards, and by twelve o’clock it was sealed.

What Cassim Did on Wednesday

Day Four — Saturday 7 November 2054

Grobler came out onto the stoep at half past eight with a sheet of paper in his hand and reading glasses pushed up into his hair, and he was laughing.

It was not a performance. Motaung had spent thirty hours in the man's company by then and had catalogued the performances, and this was not one of them. Grobler was standing at the top of his own steps in the dark with the moths going round the light above the door, and he was laughing the way a man laughs at a thing that is going to cost him money.

"Josiah." He held the sheet out at arm's length and tipped his chin to read it through the bottom of his eyes. "Do you know what your deputy has done?"

"No."

"She has written to my attorneys." He tapped the page with two fingers. "Venter Mabuza, Sandton. Fourth floor, very nice carpet, they bill me two thousand eight hundred rand an hour to tell me things I already know. She has written to them formally, on the Directorate's letterhead, under her own signature, and she has asked them one question."

He put the glasses down onto his nose properly and read it out. He read it in English, and he said so first, which was his habit and which he was not embarrassed about.

Kindly confirm, by return, whether your client or any person acting on your client's instructions presently has knowledge of the whereabouts of, or control over the movements of, the Director of the Directorate of Preventive Enforcement.

He lowered the page.

"By return," he said. "She gave them until noon today."

Motaung said nothing. The dark past the light was full of the noise the veld makes in November, and somewhere below the lodge a generator that did not need to be running was running.

"You understand the position she has put them in." Grobler folded the letter along its existing crease. "They cannot answer no. A firm cannot put a false statement in correspondence, not to a state organ, not under signature, not in a matter where the same firm is on the record in a constitutional challenge that is going to a full bench next year. If they lie to her today and it comes out in eighteen months, my application is dead and so are they. And they cannot decline to answer, because declining is an answer, and she will put the letter and the non-answer in front of a judge as an annexure and it will read very badly indeed in a paragraph about the applicant's respect for the rule of law."

"So they answered yes."

"They telephoned me at eleven o'clock this morning and Adriaan Venter used the word *catastrophic* four times, and then they answered yes." Grobler put the glasses back into his hair. "Sy't my prokureurs met hulle eie briefhoof vasgetrap. I'm saying that part in Afrikaans because I don't want it minuted."

"You have people who could have made her wait a week."

"I have people who could have made her wait a week," Grobler agreed. "And in a week I would have had my congress and she would have had a letter with a lie in it and I would have had a witness who is thirty-one years old and admitted three years and would not have slept well. No." He looked out at the dark for a moment. "No, Josiah. I have spent eleven years and forty million rand building an argument that the State does things it may not do. I am not going to lose it on a Saturday to save myself a phone call."

He went back to the door and stopped with his hand on it.

“She’s at the gate,” he said. “She has been at the gate since seven. She was told she could come up to the house and she declined, twice, and she is sitting in a Golf at my gate with the engine off. My gate man is very unhappy about it. He has offered her coffee and she has said no thank you.”

They took him down in a Hilux, the same driver as Friday, a man in his fifties with a Federation lanyard and a bad shoulder who drove with one hand and did not talk.

The lodge road was two kilometres of graded gravel with a cattle grid halfway. At the bottom the gate stood open and the security light was on and the moths were doing the same thing there that they had been doing at the house.

A young woman in a golf shirt with the firm’s crest on the breast was standing beside a white Corolla with a hire company sticker in the back window. She was called Zanele Khumalo and she introduced herself twice, once when he got out and once when she had shaken his hand, because she had clearly been briefed by somebody senior on exactly what she was and was not to say and had not been briefed on this.

“Director, I’ve been instructed to record that you are here voluntarily and are free to leave.”

“I know.”

“I’ve been instructed to record it out loud.”

“Then you’ve recorded it.”

She wrote the time on a clipboard. It was a real clipboard with a real form on it and she filled in every field, including one that said *WEATHER*, and she wrote *CLEAR*, which was wrong, because there was a storm sitting on the Magaliesberg ridge that had been building since four and had not decided anything yet.

Cassim’s Golf was thirty metres up the district road with its nose pointing back towards Pretoria. She was sitting in the driver’s seat

with the door open and her feet on the gravel, and she stood up when she saw him coming and did not walk to meet him.

"Director."

"Deputy."

"Not here," she said. "There's a garage at the T-junction with the Hartbeespoort road. Nine kilometres. I'll follow you or you can get in, I don't mind which, but I'm not doing this in front of that firm's Saturday associate."

He got in.

The forecourt was lit the way all of them are lit, too bright and slightly green, and it was full because it was Saturday night on the dam road. A bakkie with a boat on a trailer was taking up two pumps. A family was buying ice. There was a man with a reflective vest and no employer directing cars that did not need directing, and Cassim gave him ten rand on the way in, before he had done anything, which meant she had been here before or was simply a person who did that.

She parked away from the pumps, under the shop wall, and turned the engine off, and the heat came in almost immediately.

Then she reached into the back and put a green accordion file on his lap. It had a rubber band round it. The rubber band was one of the thick ones the registry used, and he had been looking at those rubber bands for nineteen years.

"That's yours," she said. "Everything I've done since Wednesday. It's a copy. The originals are in the matter file and the matter file is in a safe at Struben Street with a number on it that I'll give you before I go."

"Ayesha—"

"Open it in your own time. I'm going to tell it to you first, because you'll want to hear it out of a person's mouth and then check it against the paper, and that's the correct order and I'd do it that way too." She put both hands on the top of the steering wheel. "Section sixteen sub three. Refused."

"When?"

"Sixteen forty on Wednesday."

He had been in a chicken shop on a corner in Pretoria North at sixteen forty on Wednesday, with his back to the window, waiting for his hands to stop.

"You said five."

"I said probably by five. It was twenty to." Cassim's mouth did something that was not a smile. "The refusal is one page and about a third of it is the letterhead. The reason given is that no exceptional circumstances were disclosed. I disclosed that the subject was the Director of the Directorate and had served nineteen years and had no prior contact of record with the anticipated victim. That is the entire universe of exceptional circumstances available, and it was found not to disclose any."

"Pillay wrote that herself?"

"Pillay signed it. It's a template. There's a field for the section and a field for the reason and the reason field has four options in a drop-down." She said this flatly, as information. "I've seen ninety of them. They're all the same."

Motaung looked at the file on his lap and did not open it.

"Thursday," she said. "Twelve twenty. I filed an urgent review application in the High Court in Pretoria. Two prayers. One, review and setting aside of the refusal. Two, an order that section fourteen sub six is inconsistent with the Constitution to the extent that it prevents a named person from answering a finding made against them." She paused very slightly. "You'll notice that the second prayer is the Federation's case. It is nearly word for word the Federation's case. I know what that looks like in this car and I'm telling you before you ask me."

"When is it set down?"

"The eighteenth."

"The window closes on Monday."

"The window closes on Monday," Cassim said, "and the eighteenth is the fastest urgent date that division has given anybody in four years, and I got it by standing at the registrar's counter for two hours and

being extremely irritating. I asked for Friday. I was told Friday was not available and that I should be grateful, and I was told that by a man who was being kind to me.”

The bakkie with the boat pulled off the forecourt and the pumps were briefly empty and then they were not.

“And the third thing,” she said.

“There’s a third thing.”

“Thursday, five past seven in the morning. Written instruction to the operations desk, copied to Naidoo, to legal, and to internal security.” She took her phone out, found it, and held it where he could read it, and did not read it aloud, which he was grateful for in a way he could not have explained.

It was four lines. Row five of the escalation protocol — the ninety-day behavioural retrospective — required the signature of the Deputy Director. That signature was reserved to her personally. It would not be given by any other officer, in her absence, under delegation, or by operation of the standing authorities.

He read it twice.

Row five unlocked at six o’clock on Sunday morning. That was nine hours and thirty-five minutes away, and he had worked out on Wednesday night in a scrapyard in Rosslyn that nobody survives row five, and he had spent every hour since then arranging his life around the certainty that it would fire.

“It won’t run,” he said.

“It won’t run until I sign.”

“And you’re not signing.”

“I’m not signing today.” She put the phone face down on her thigh. “Director, I want to be careful here. I’m not doing you a favour. I’m exercising a discretion that the protocol gives me, in writing, on the record, with copies to four people, so that when the review committee comes to look at it there is no question about who did what on which day. That instruction protects me as much as it protects you. I want that said out loud, because in about two days somebody is going to

suggest that I did it out of sentiment, and I'd rather you heard the true version from me first."

He sat with the file on his knees in a hot car on a petrol station forecourt outside Hartbeespoort and did the thing he had come there to do.

"The memo," he said.

"Which memo."

"Wednesday morning. Twenty to seven. You were in my office with a memo about the sealing provision before anybody in that building had read the six o'clock distribution."

"Lesego flagged it on the Monday. The 2049 sealed findings go to long store this month and long store is a different retention schedule and the schedule needs a signature from the Deputy or the Director. It was in my Monday pile and I got to it on the Tuesday afternoon and I brought it up on the Wednesday because Wednesday was my slot in your diary." She did not sound defensive. She sounded like a person answering questions about a diary. "It's in the file. Lesego's note has a date stamp on it."

"The March review. You asked for it in front of nine people."

"I asked for it in writing on the eleventh of September, to you, copied to legal. You didn't answer. I asked again on the third of October. You didn't answer. I put it in a meeting because you don't ignore things in a minute." A beat. "That's also in the file. Both emails, and the minute."

"The secondment."

"What about it."

"Eleven weeks. Why you?"

And here she turned her head and looked at him properly for the first time since the gate.

"Because I argued against the Act," Cassim said. "In 2044, as a candidate attorney, second chair to a woman called Marks in a matter we lost badly. It's on my CV. It has been on my CV for ten years. It was the third question at my interview and I answered it for eleven minutes and they gave me the post four days later." She turned back

to the windscreen. "They didn't send me in spite of it, Director. They sent me because of it. The committee has been carrying a report since 2052 that says the Directorate has no internal critic of any seniority and has not had one since 2039, and rather than say that in public they seconded one and called it a secondment. That's the whole conspiracy. It's in a minute too, and the minute is boring, and I can get you the number."

Everything had a date on it.

That was what he noticed, sitting there, and he noticed it the way he noticed everything, which was as an operational feature before it was anything else. Every answer she gave him had a date and a reference and a person's name attached to it, and she had produced all of them without hesitating and without once asking him why he was asking.

And she had made him a copy on Thursday.

That was the part. She had sat down at some point on Thursday, in the middle of the worst week of her professional life, and she had photocopied the entire matter file, and she had banded it with a registry rubber band and put it in the back of her car, because she had known that when she eventually found him he was going to want to check her.

He got out of the car.

He did it without saying anything, which was rude, and he walked across the forecourt to the shop and went in past a man buying a boerewors roll and stood in the aisle in front of the cold drinks with the fridge noise going, and he did not open the fridge.

He had been a detective for eleven years before any of this. He had sat across a table from a great many people and asked them four questions in a particular order, and what he had been doing for the last six minutes was that, exactly that, in the front seat of a nine-year-old Golf, to a woman who had gone to the High Court on his behalf on the Thursday of a week in which she had also had to run his organisation.

He had built her out of true facts. Every component of it had been true and every component of it had been checkable and he had not checked one of them, in three days, because checking would have taken him nine minutes and he had known.

He bought two cold drinks he did not want and went back out.

She had wound both front windows down. He handed her one of the bottles and she took it and put it in the cup holder without opening it.

"I want to record something," he said.

"All right."

"I formed a view on Wednesday afternoon that you were the author of this. I acted on that view. I want it recorded that the view was wrong and that I had no evidential basis for it beyond the sequence of events, and that I am withdrawing it." He heard himself. "Unreservedly."

Cassim let about four seconds go past.

"Noted," she said.

"You should understand how it assembled." He put his hand flat on the file. "You had the seal memo, you had the review, the committee had extended me twice, you had a magistrate applied to inside an hour, and you said *for the Bureau*. Five facts, all of them true, and they went together in about—"

"Director."

"—four seconds, which is the point, because that is precisely what the—"

"Director." Not loud. She did not raise her voice at all; she simply put it down in front of him the way you put a hand out to stop a door. "I have been awake since Wednesday. I don't need the working."

The forecourt lights buzzed. Somebody's alarm chirped twice.

"I'm sorry," Motaung said.

It came out in the wrong shape. It came out too quiet and slightly too late, in the voice he used for saying *chief* to Naidoo in a corridor, and he had a moment of standing outside himself and hearing a man of sixty-one who had built a national institution and had, apparently, never once in nineteen years had to do this, and had therefore never learned that it is a skill.

"I'm sorry, Ayesha."

"I know," she said.

She did not say it warmly. She said it the way you acknowledge receipt.

"I'm not going to tell you it's all right," she said, "because it isn't, and I've got about six things to do tonight and none of them are this. What you did on Wednesday afternoon cost me the only two hours in this whole matter when I had a Director to work with. I spent Thursday explaining to a bench that a man who runs away from a preventive warrant is not necessarily evidence of anything, and I could have spent it better." She rubbed her eyes with the heels of both hands, briefly, once. "And on Monday I have to go into a room with the committee and account for the fact that I have withheld a signature for four days, and I will do it, and I'll probably win, and then I'll come back and sign it."

"You'll have to."

"I'll have to. I'd like you to understand that clearly." She turned in the seat. "I am not on your side, Director. I am doing my job, and my job includes you. On Wednesday and Thursday I read four other packets and I authorised all four. Two of those I would authorise in any legal system I can imagine. One of them I'm going to think about for the rest of my life. That was the job before your name came out of the distribution and it will be the job after, and if I hold row five past Tuesday they will take it off me and give it to somebody who signs everything, and then you will have neither a deputy nor a delay."

"Then come in with me on Monday," he said, "is what you're going to say."

"I was going to say it tonight." She said it without any particular hope. "The offer's the same as Wednesday. I walk you in, you go through the front, it's a photograph of an institution behaving properly instead of a photograph of a parkade. The difference between Wednesday and tonight is that on Wednesday it would also have been true."

"No."

"I know." She started the engine. "I'm required to have asked."

Then she said, in the flat voice of a person delivering the last item

on a list: “They made me acting Director on Thursday morning. The committee. It’s a standing provision, it kicks in automatically when the Director is the subject of a warrant, and I found out because Naidoo’s assistant addressed an email to me by the title and then apologised for it in a second email.”

Acting Director.

Thursday morning, and the row five instruction had gone to the operations desk on Thursday at five past seven, and a person who was about to be handed an organisation might very reasonably want to be seen to be protecting the man she was—

He felt it start.

He felt it start the way you feel a car begin to move on a slope, and it was the same machine, the same four seconds, the same true bricks going into the same true wall, and he sat in the passenger seat of her car with a green file on his knees and stopped it, physically, with his jaw shut and his hand around a cold bottle, and it cost him more than anything he had done since Wednesday.

“Director?”

“Nothing,” he said. “It’s nothing.”

She dropped him at the edge of the forecourt because she would not drive him anywhere else. She said so plainly: taking him to Pretoria was section twenty-two, four years, non-negotiable, and there was already one officer committing that offence for him this week and one was the maximum the country could afford.

He did not tell her who.

He stood with the file under his arm and watched her indicate, properly, on an empty district road at half past ten at night, and then the Golf went up the hill towards the R511 and its tail lights went round the bend and that was all.

The storm on the ridge had still not decided anything.

He walked out to the junction, where there was a shelter with no roof on it and four people waiting, and in about twenty minutes a Quantum came down from the dam going to Pretoria with eleven people in it,

and he paid cash and sat in the middle of the back row with his knees against the seat in front and his head down, the way ninety thousand vehicles a day carry people that nobody has ever bothered to count.

Four Hundred and Nine

Day Four — Saturday 7 November 2054

“How many are there?” he said.

He had been standing in his own kitchen for four minutes and that was the first thing either of them had said.

He had come in the way he had worked out on Thursday and not used: down the servitude behind Codonia, over the wall at the corner where the neighbour’s creeper had taken the top course of brick and made a step of it, and in at the kitchen door, which had a key under a paint tin because it had always had a key under a paint tin. The watch car was a grey Avanza with a municipal disc parked at the top of the road facing down, and the relief came up from the garage side at ten, and it took the relief four minutes to make the turn. He had approved the standing pattern for residential watches in 2041. Four minutes had seemed reasonable in 2041.

Miriam had the radio on low, the Saturday programme where people phoned in, and a man was saying that the Directorate knew, the Directorate had always known, and she reached over and turned him off before Motaung got to the table.

On Thursday he had come here with dates. He had stood on the other side of that table and given her reference numbers and times of access, all of them correct, and she had picked up a dishcloth and started on a pan that was already clean, and when he had finished she had said one sentence and gone to bed.

“How many are there,” he said again.

She put the dishcloth down. It was a different dishcloth. She put

it down on the counter, folded once, and looked at him for what he estimated afterwards as three seconds.

"Sit," she said. "You're going to be here a while and you're standing like a man at a counter."

"Miriam."

"Four hundred and nine," she said.

He sat.

She did not leave the room. She went to the shelf above the bread bin — the shelf he had walked past four minutes earlier, between the Pyrex dish and the recipe file — and took them down two and three at a time and put them on the kitchen table in two stacks because one stack would not stand.

Ten hardcover cash books. A4, feint and margin, the kind sold in any CNA for the price of a loaf, and every one of them covered in brown paper folded over the boards the way you cover a schoolbook, and labelled on the front in her ballpoint. KONFYT 2043-44 at the bottom of the stack, and so on up to KONFYT 52-53.

The eleventh had no cover on it at all. It was the one she was still writing in.

"Open the first one," she said.

He opened the first one. On the inside cover was a shopping list. Cake flour, Handy Andy, the good coffee if it's on. On page one was a recipe for pumpkin fritters in her hand, and on page two the rest of it, and on page three a recipe for a beef stew that took three pages because she had written down her mother's version and then her own underneath it.

Page seven was a sealed finding.

It was copied out entire. Not summarised, not noted: copied. The header block in capitals, the registry number, the reader letter, the two horizontal rules ruled in blue biro against the edge of a ruler, and where the original carried two asterisks around the sealing endorsement she had drawn two small stars. The subject was a man named

Bekker, D.J., and the anticipated victim was a woman with the same surname, and the finding was that he would not.

"It took me the first year to work out how to do it so it was worth anything," Miriam said. "The first eleven are wrong. Not wrong in the words. I left the reference numbers off, because I thought the number was the dangerous part, and then I had eleven pieces of paper that couldn't be tied to anything, which is the same as having nothing. So I put the numbers in after that." She sat down opposite him. "If you're going to do a thing, do it so it counts."

"You wrote these out by hand."

"Yes."

"Eleven years."

"The devices in that building log a job number, a machine, a card number and a page count, and the registry keeps the log for seven years, and I'm the person who keeps it." She said it the way she would have said that the milk was finished. "So, by hand."

"Nothing comes out of that store."

"Nothing comes out of that store," she agreed. "Findings don't. Working papers do. The reconciliation worksheet is a working paper. You go in without a phone, you sit at the desk, you write what you need on the worksheet, you come out with the worksheet, and when you're done with it you put it in the confidential bin and you sign the seal on the bin." She turned her cup round. "The Registrar signs the seal. I have signed the seal on that bin twice a week since 2043. Nobody has ever asked me what was in it, because I am the person they would ask."

He thought about that for a moment: that the whole of it ran on a provision he could recite, and that the provision was not a weakness. It was the only way a registry can work. Somebody has to be the last person, and the last person has to be trusted, and there is no procedure underneath that. He had signed off on the seal design himself, in a colour brochure, at a cost of eleven rand a unit.

He turned pages. He did it the way he did everything, from the front, in order, and she let him, and the kitchen clock went on with the small

tick it had developed and neither of them had ever mentioned.

The findings came about three to a month. Between them were recipes. Between them were a page of telephone numbers, a note about a plumber, half a page of a hymn number and a date, and, in the 2048 book, a list of names of people who had brought food to a funeral, so that the right thank-you letters could be written.

"Wednesday night," he said.

"Mm."

"Where were you on Wednesday night?"

"Here," she said. "At this table."

He put his hand flat on the uncovered book without opening it.

"They searched the house on Wednesday evening," she said. "Two of them. Van der Merwe, and a young one who called me ma'am about forty times. They were polite. They did the study and the bedrooms and they were in this kitchen a good quarter of an hour. The young one stood where you're sitting now and opened the bread bin and looked inside it, because there's a form and the form says containers."

"And the shelf."

"He read the shelf," Miriam said. "Both of them did. Then he asked me whether I do the pumpkin fritters with a batter or without, because his mother does them with, and I said without, and he wrote nothing down, and they apologised for the inconvenience and went."

Motaung looked at the two stacks and at the brown paper and at his wife's handwriting on it.

"Konfyt."

"It's not a code, Josiah. It's what's in the front of every one of them, and the back of most of them." She turned her cup round. "I covered them because they were getting marked at the corners. That's the whole reason. A thing that nobody has hidden is a thing nobody looks at, and I worked that out afterwards, not before, and I have never been able to decide whether that makes me clever or lucky."

He asked her about Grobler because he had to, and because if he did not ask it now he would be asking it in his head for the rest of the night while she talked about other things.

“Sibanda put a retention hold on the registry in August,” she said. “Everything touching the Federation matter. Grobler’s name is in that affidavit somewhere over four hundred times, so every file it touches has to be identified, listed and held, and the person who does that is the Registrar, and the Registrar is me. I’ve been in and out of that name since the twelfth of August. It’s item four on my task list. It was item four on my task list on Wednesday and it’s item four on it now.”

That was the whole of it. It took her nineteen seconds.

He had built a thing out of those access entries on Thursday night that had taken him about four seconds to assemble and had cost him two days, and the pieces of it had all been true, and the shape they made had been a shape he brought with him.

“Miriam—”

“No,” she said. “Not yet. There’s something in the last book you need to read first, and after you’ve read it you can say whatever you were going to say, and I’ll still be sitting here.”

She turned the uncovered book round to face him and opened it near the back and pushed it across.

It was on the left-hand page, filling it, and it ran four lines onto the right. Her ruled lines. Her capitals. Her two small stars.

DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTIVE ENFORCEMENT
FINDING OF ANTICIPATED HOMICIDE
REGISTRY GP/2054/11-0883-B

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

s.14(2)(a) Preventive Enforcement

FILED 04 Nov 2054 09:40

** SEALED - s.14(6) - NOT FOR DISCLOSURE

SUBJECT	MOTAUNG, Josiah Thabo
ANTICIPATED VICTIM	GROBLER, Cornelius Johannes
WINDOW	06 days, expiring 24:00, 09 Nov 2054

FINDING: The subject will not cause the death of the named person.

will remove himself from the window and will not be within reach of person at any point during it.

Intent formation: assessed absent.

READER'S NOTE: None.

Will not.

He read it, and then he read the two words again on their own, and then he sat back in the chair and discovered that his hands were on the edge of the table and that he had been pushing.

For four days he had been trying to prove a negative in a system he had designed to make negatives unprovable. He had slept in a scrapped Quantum. He had gone through change-control logs at a borrowed terminal in a municipal office with the power off. He had let four men in good suits drive him into the Magaliesberg and had sat across a table from a general with a bottle of water and an indemnity form. He had accused his deputy of eleven weeks of construction and his wife of thirty-four years of one. And it had been eleven metres under his own building the whole time, written at twenty to ten on Wednesday morning by a shift worker with a headache, in a room with a broken chair in it, and sealed by lunchtime.

He put his palms flat and took them off the table and put them in his lap.

"Loots," he said.

"Wynand Loots. Suite B."

"Fourteen months since his last one."

"Sixteen," she said. "But that's in the 52-53 book."

He put two fingers on the page, on nothing, on the space between the ruled line and the word FINDING.

"He'll never know," Motaung said.

"No."

"He'll work another nineteen years and he will never be told what happened after nine-forty on Wednesday morning."

"No," she said. "He won't."

He had written that clause. He had written it in a room in 2035 with three other people and a flip chart, and it had been the humane version, because a Reader who is told outcomes starts assessing to a score, and a Reader assessing to a score is a machine with a person's signature on it, and they had all agreed, and they had been right.

Motaung took his hand off the page.

"Four hundred and nine," he said. "Out of what."

She had the totals in the back of the uncovered book, on the last three pages, in a table she had ruled herself and extended twice with a second and third sheet gummed in along the fold.

"Fifteen thousand eight hundred and two findings in the Gauteng registry since the first of January 2043," she said. "Four hundred and nine of them had a dissent in them. That's one in thirty-nine."

"Which means the three of them agree ninety-seven times out of a hundred."

"Ninety-seven point four."

"That's a good number."

"It's the best number in the book, or it's the worst one," Miriam said. "I stopped trying to decide that in about 2047. I write it down every year anyway, because it's true and it belongs in there with the rest."

She turned the page.

"Now. There's a digit on the index card that isn't on the finding. Means band, one to ten, worked out off the subject's declared income and their address. It's on the card because if a named person can't pay for a representative at the twelve-month review the State appoints one, and the State has to know who it's paying for."

"I know why it's there."

"You put it there," she said. "In the regulations, not the Act. 2037. It's a good provision and I've never heard anybody complain about it."

She ran her finger down the ruled column.

"Band one. That's the bottom tenth. Six thousand one hundred and eleven findings in eleven years — nearly four out of every ten people we name are in band one, which is its own thing and I'm not going to talk about it tonight. Nineteen dissents. One in three hundred and twenty-one."

He did not say anything.

"Band five. One thousand eight hundred and ninety findings. Forty-four dissents. One in forty-three."

"Miriam."

"Band ten. The top tenth. Two hundred and six findings in eleven years, because there aren't many of them and there was never going to be. Sixty-one dissents." She looked up. "One in three point four."

The fridge cycled on behind him and he heard it.

"And it goes up at every band between," she said. "Every one. There is no band where it goes down, and there is no year where the shape isn't there. I checked for a year where it wasn't there. I wanted there to be one."

He did the division in his head, because that is what he does.

Ninety-four.

He knew where he had met that number. He had stood in front of a room in 2036 and argued for it for two hours, and had written it into the design specification with his own hand, and had believed then and believed now that a system that catches everybody is a country nobody wants to live in.

It was a coincidence. Two numbers out of a hundred numbers, in a book on a kitchen table.

He put his hand over his mouth and left it there.

"A rich man's file is a different object," he said, eventually. "That's what that is. He has a bank that lends him money, so there's a credit record; an employer who writes references; a lawyer who sends letters that get logged; a medical aid; a passport with stamps in it. Every one of those is a countervailing signal, and they go in with everything else."

A man in band one has an arrest at nineteen, a clinic file, a landlord's complaint and four addresses in six years, and nothing on the other side of the page, because nobody writes letters about him. It's not malice. It's what there is to read."

"Mm," said Miriam.

"You know that's what it is."

"I don't know anything about why," she said. "That's not what the books are for. I've got four hundred and nine people that one person out of three said no about, and I can't tell you a single thing about any one of them after the day it was sealed, and neither can you, and neither can Loots, and neither can the magistrate. The books are the count. That's all they are. I'm not arguing with you, Josiah. I'm telling you what's in them."

"I'm not arguing either."

"You are," she said, without heat. "But not with me."

He pulled the 45-46 book over and opened it where it fell open, which was at a finding on a woman called Thembi Dlamini, band two, anticipated victim her employer, dissent filed by Reader A at ten past three on a Friday.

"Do you remember doing this one?"

"I remember the evening," Miriam said. "There was a power cut and I did it with the paraffin lamp on the tray and the writing goes downhill on the second page. That's all I remember. I don't know what happened to her. I have never known what happened to any of them." She reached over and turned the book back to where he had it. "That's not a thing I've made my peace with, Josiah. It's just a thing that's true."

He asked her when it started, because it was the only question left that he could ask without the answer costing something immediately.

"The 2042 annual report," she said. "I was three weeks into the registry. There's a table on page thirty-one — warrants issued, orders renewed, reviews conducted, deaths in custody. Somebody's clerk had put a row in it for sealed findings and left the figure blank, and it

went up the line to me to fill in, and I went looking for where the figure gets compiled.” She shrugged with one shoulder. “It doesn’t get compiled. It can’t be published because the findings are sealed, so nobody publishes it, so nobody produces it, so nobody counts. They took the row out of the table for the 2043 report. That was a whole meeting. Sibanda’s predecessor drafted a note on it.”

“So you counted.”

“Somebody had to have the number,” she said. “It’s a number. It exists whether it’s written down or not. It was going past me at three a month and I could not sit at that counter and let it go past.”

“And then what.”

“And then nothing,” Miriam said. “And then I wrote them down.”

“Eleven years.”

“Eleven years.”

“Who else has seen these.”

She looked at him.

“Nobody,” she said. “Ever. Not one of them, not one page, not to a journalist, not to a lawyer, not to that committee, not to the union, not to your deputy, and not to you until eleven minutes ago.” She said it without emphasis, which was how he knew it had been decided a long time ago and gone over since. “I’ve had four hundred and nine chances to be a hero, Josiah, and every single one of them ends with the books being taken away and burnt and nobody counting anything ever again. So I did the boring thing. I kept the count. Somebody was going to want it one day.”

“For what?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “For this, apparently.”

He looked at her right hand where it lay on the uncovered book.

There was a bump on the middle finger, on the inside of the last joint, hard and yellowish, the kind a child gets in matric and loses by thirty. He had seen it for years. He had assumed it was the registry — signatures, seals, sixty forms a day — and it was, in the sense that

it was the registry, and he had never once made the arithmetic of it, which was three findings a month for eleven years, at this table, in the hours when he was not in the house.

"When do you do it," he said.

"Tuesdays and Thursdays, mostly. Whenever the store has been busy. It takes about an hour each."

"At this table."

"At this table."

He looked at the table. He had eaten off it every day for nineteen years except when he had not come home. He had put his keys down on it. He had stood at the end of it with a plate in his hand more times than he could count, reading something, while she wrote at the other end with the small lamp pulled over and the radio on.

He had asked her once. He was certain he had asked her once, and near enough certain of the year.

"I asked you what you were writing."

"You did."

"What did you tell me?"

"Recipes," Miriam said.

"And I said?"

"You said 'mm', and you took your plate through, and you went to bed. It was 2049." She squared the uncovered book with the edge of the table, one finger at a corner. "You were tired. You had the retention run and you'd been at that building since half past five. I'm not making a point."

"You are."

"No," she said. "If I'd wanted to make a point I'd have told you in 2049."

He stood up because he could not stay in the chair, and he went to the window over the sink and looked through the burglar bars at his own back yard, at the gate motor that had ground since 2049 and

that he had been going to see to, and at the security light that came on when a cat went past.

It was twenty past eleven on Saturday night.

At six o'clock on Sunday morning the fifth row of the ladder came off the shelf, and stayed on the shelf only for as long as a thirty-four-year-old woman two floors below his office refused to put her name on a form. On Monday at nine a room in Sandton would fill up with four hundred delegates and three broadcast crews. At midnight on Monday the window shut.

Thirty-one hours; fifty-eight; seventy-three. He had the three numbers before he had decided to work them out.

Behind him she was moving the stacks, making room, putting the first four books along the wall side of the table and the rest in front of her chair.

"Josiah."

He turned round.

"I need to tell you what happens if that page ever gets read out loud," Miriam said. "Because you're standing there thinking it's the thing that saves you, and it is, and you haven't got to the rest of it yet."

"I've got to some of it."

"You haven't got to my part," she said. "Sit down. Bring the tea, it's had long enough."

He brought the pot and two cups from the tray she had put out before he arrived, which was a thing he noticed and did not remark on, and he sat down where she had made room.

She opened the uncovered book at the back, at the index, where every entry from January was written in a column with its registry number and its date, one line each, in her hand. She uncapped the pen.

She wrote GP/2054/11-0883-B on the first free line, and the date next to it, and then she put the pen down across the page and left it lying there, because she was not finished.

The Count

Day Four — Saturday 7 November 2054

The kitchen clock said ten past eleven. It had said ten past eleven for six years, because the battery housing had corroded and neither of them had thrown it away, and the actual time was on the stove, and the stove said 23:14.

Miriam had made tea at some point and neither of them had drunk it. The two cups stood on the table on either side of the open book with a skin on them.

The book was an A4 hardcover cash book, faint and margin, the kind sold in every stationery shop in the country for keeping stock. There were eleven of them. Ten were stacked at his left elbow in brown paper covers, the way she had covered his schoolbooks for him once, forty years ago, when he went back at night to finish matric. Each cover was labelled in her handwriting in blue ballpoint.

KONFYT 2043-44. KONFYT 44-45. KONFYT 45-46. KONFYT 46-47. KONFYT 47-48. KONFYT 48-49. KONFYT 49-50. KONFYT 50-51. KONFYT 51-52. KONFYT 52-53.

They had lived on the shelf above the bread bin, between a Pyrex dish and a recipe file, for eleven years. He had eaten two thousand suppers under them.

The eleventh was open between them at the fourth of November, which was three days old and was the last entry in it, and the entry filled a page and a half in her upright registry hand with the registry abbreviations intact, because she copied what was in front of her and did not tidy it. GP/2054/11-0883-B. Filed 09:40. Sealed 12:00. Reader B. Halfway down the second column were four words he had

now read perhaps thirty times, and they had stopped being about him at around the tenth.

The subject will not.

"How many are alive," he said.

She did not ask him to be more specific. She put her glasses back on and turned to the last page of the current book, where there was a column of running totals in pencil, the pencil because the totals changed.

"Four hundred and nine sealed since I got the store in 2043," she said. "Forty-three have died. Two of those were before uptake. Forty-one at Doringkop. Three hundred and sixty-six are there tonight."

"You keep the deaths."

"A death closes a finding. The register comes across my desk to be marked off, and I mark it off, and then I come home and I mark it off again." She turned the page back. "It's the only outcome we're ever told."

He looked at the column. It was in the same hand as the shopping list on the fridge.

"Josiah," she said. "Eat something."

"No."

"There's rice."

"No."

She got up anyway and put the plate in the microwave and did not turn it on, and then stood with her back to the counter, which was where she stood when she had decided to let a silence run.

He worked it the way he worked everything, which was forward, in order, out loud, because he had been running the same meetings for nineteen years and his mouth did not know another shape.

"There are three ways it gets out," he said. "I take it to Sibanda, and it dies in the building, because it's a page in the Registrar's handwriting and the Registrar took it out of a sealed store, and the first thing legal

does with an unlawfully obtained document is put it in a safe. I take it to Ayesha, and she does everything correctly, and correctly is four months and a set-down date in March.”

“And the third.”

“The third is a man with eleven minutes on Monday morning and three broadcast crews in the room, whose attorneys have already told a full bench that the concurrence point is thin and that they intend to amplify it.” He turned the cup back the other quarter turn. “He doesn’t need it to be lawfully obtained. He needs it to be read out with cameras running. After that no court in the country can pretend it hasn’t been.”

Miriam did not say anything to that. She had been a registrar for eleven years and she knew what a document was and what a document in a room was.

“If it goes into the record,” he said, “the first thing that happens is section fourteen sub six.”

“Yes.”

“There is now a document in existence which says that a Reader found against the finding on the Director of the Directorate, and which was sealed on the Director’s own instrument, and which the Director was refused a sight of under a clause he wrote. No bench in this country dismisses that. They can’t. The moment it’s in front of a judge, the seal is a dead letter and the March review is a formality that happens in a week instead of in four months.”

“That’s Ayesha’s review.”

“It’s her review and she’ll lose control of it in an afternoon.” He turned his cup a quarter turn on the table and did not drink it. “Then the second thing. And the second thing is the one that matters.”

Miriam waited.

“Every person named on a two-of-three asks the same question. Was there one in mine. And the State cannot answer it, because the answer is in a store that has just been opened, and it cannot refuse to answer it, because it has just been made to answer it once. Sibanda will run privilege for about eleven weeks and then he’ll come and tell me it can’t be held.” He stopped. “He’ll come and tell Ayesha.”

“Yes.”

“So the concurrence goes. Not the instrument. The instrument is fine. The concurrence.” He put two fingers on the table. “Two of three is a test that assumes three findings that can be compared. If one of the three is a document nobody may see, then nobody has ever been able to say whether the test was passed. That’s not an argument about the machine. It’s an argument about arithmetic, and it’s the one Grobler’s people said was thin, and this is the thing that makes it fat.”

“And then the orders.”

“And then the orders.” He heard his own voice go flat and administrative and could not stop it, and did not particularly want to. “Every order at Doringkop is annual. It runs to its anniversary and a magistrate signs the renewal. Pillay signs about ninety thousand a year across the province and she has never declined one, and she has never declined one because there is no way to be shown wrong and every way to be shown right. Change that. Put her in a position where the renewal she signs on a Tuesday can be taken on review on the Wednesday and she can be asked, in open court, what she satisfied herself of. She stops signing. Not out of principle. Out of exposure.”

“How long.”

“Twelve months for the anniversaries to come round. Then the discharge tail. Release address, medical, transport, the reintegration payment.” He looked at his hands. “Six months. It’s eighteen months to empty the Estate and I know it’s eighteen because I wrote the discharge regulation in 2037 for a case that never came, and I costed the tail at six months, and I remember arguing that six was generous.”

The fridge cycled off. In the quiet after it he could hear the clock that had stopped, which was impossible, and was the wall.

“Eleven thousand three hundred and forty-seven,” Miriam said.

“Yes.”

“Say the rest of it.”

“You know the rest of it.”

"Say it in your own kitchen, Josiah, where it's cheap."

He did not enjoy that, and she had not offered it to be enjoyed.

"If it stays sealed," he said, "the Estate stays full and the machine goes on. The intake is what, now."

"Six hundred and four last year." She said it without going to the book. "It was one thousand four hundred and twelve in 2044. It comes down every year because the pool comes down every year. That is a true fact and I'm not going to pretend it isn't."

"And the ground at Bronkhorstspuit."

"Is bought and is in the capital plan and I typed the submission." She took her glasses off again. "For after the second review cycle. Two thousand beds."

"Which we won't need at six hundred a year."

"Which somebody costed anyway," Miriam said.

"And the murder rate is a matter of record," he said.

"It is."

"Say it properly, since we're being cheap."

Miriam looked at him for a moment and then said it properly, in the voice she used at the counter, which was the same voice she used everywhere.

"Gauteng recorded four thousand one hundred and six homicides in 2034 and eight hundred and ninety-one last year, and there is no serious person in this country who thinks the whole of that is the police getting better at their jobs. It is the lowest since 1908 and 1908 is not a real comparison because in 1908 they weren't counting properly, and I know that because I've been the one who has to write the footnote." She sat back. "You want me to say it and then take it away from you. I'm not going to. It's true and it stays true for the rest of the night."

"And the ones filling it are from Orange Farm and Vosloorus and Katlehong and Diepsloot."

"Yes."

"Because that's where the killing is."

"Yes. And because that's where the record is." She said it without any weight at all, which was worse than weight. "A man who has been in a state hospital and a state court and a state school and on a state grant has fourteen years of substrate behind him. A man in Waterloo has a private matric, a medical aid that keeps its own records, and a family court file that was settled before it was heard, and if he puts his wife's head into a door frame on a Friday the instrument looks at a thin file with no priors in it and says nothing at all. That is not somebody's malice. It's what there is to look at."

"It's a coverage problem," Motaung said. "It's fixable."

"It's been fixable for nineteen years," Miriam said.

He let that be. She had not said it to win anything and there was nowhere to put it.

The other thing she had told him an hour ago was still lying on the table under everything, and neither of them picked it up: the dissent rate, plotted against the income decile of the subject, in her handwriting, in pencil, on the inside back cover of KONFYT 52-53. He had looked at it for a long time and had not been able to find the error, because there wasn't one.

"How many of them did it," he said.

"How many of them would have."

"Yes."

"Nobody knows."

"Miriam."

"Nobody knows, and I'm the only person alive who's put a number on it, and the number is not a number. It's a range." She sat down again, across from him, and pulled the current book towards her and opened the back board flat. "I did this in 2050. I've done it twice since."

There were two lines in pencil, and under them a third line in ink that had been added later.

"Take it at the top first," she said. "Our own concordance study. 2048, the one that went to the portfolio committee, the one with the nine in ten in the executive summary. If the instrument is as good as we told Parliament it is, then of the people at Doringkop tonight, ten thousand two hundred and twelve were correctly named."

"And the bottom."

"The bottom is the base rate, and the base rate is what the cohort can carry. In the worst four years this province ever had, with the grid down and the stations not answering, the very worst cohort we could draw a box around still only produced a killer at about one in nine." She put the pencil tip on the second line and left it there. "One thousand two hundred and sixty."

He read the two numbers.

"Between one thousand two hundred and sixty and ten thousand two hundred and twelve," Miriam said. "That is the count. That's the whole of what eleven years gets you."

His hand was flat on the table. He had not put it there deliberately. There was a worn patch in the varnish under it about the size of a side plate, from his own forearm, from nineteen years of eating at the same seat.

"That's a spread of nearly nine thousand people," he said.

"Eight thousand nine hundred and fifty-two."

She did not have to look it up either. It was the third line, the one in ink, sitting under the two pencil ones with nothing next to it, no working, no note. She had done the subtraction at some point and written the answer down and left it there, and a woman who writes a number down and gives it no label has been carrying it around for a while.

"You'd need a control group."

"Yes," Miriam said.

He nodded slowly. "We minuted that in 2035."

"I typed the minute."

Neither of them said anything else about it. She closed the back

board and squared the book to the edge of the table, which was a thing he did, and which he had never once noticed she did too.

"So if you say nothing," she said, "then somewhere between one thousand two hundred and ten thousand two hundred people are in a bed tonight who should be, and everyone else in that fence is a man who has had eight years taken off him for a sentence in a file. And if you say it, all of them go home in eighteen months, in order, with a transport voucher, including the ones at the top of my range."

"Yes."

"And I can't tell you which of them are which. Nobody can tell you which of them are which. Not the Readers, because they're never told. Not Ayesha, because it isn't in the packet. Not you."

"Grobler has the number to two decimal places," Motaung said. "He's never been there."

"I know. I've read his affidavit. It's correct." Miriam pushed the tea away from herself, finally, because it had been cold for two hours. "That's not a small thing to have to say in this house."

"There's a man in there called Mahlangu," she said.

He looked up.

"Petrus Sipho Mahlangu. Sealed finding, September 2046. He was forty-one. Panel beater in Vosloorus, worked for a man called Sarel who kept him on through the Brownouts and paid him in cash and diesel. Anticipated victim was his brother's wife, Nomsa. Reader B dissented and it went two of three and he was taken up on a Thursday."

"You've never told me a name."

"I've never told anybody a name." She had her hands in her lap. "He came to the counter in 2047. They're allowed to; they're brought up for the annual and some of them ask on the way through. He wanted a copy of his own finding. He knew he couldn't have it. He'd had a year to work out that he couldn't have it and he came and asked anyway, and I gave him the refusal on the template, and he read the template all the way to the end, which almost nobody does."

“And then?”

“And then he asked me whether it could be posted to his mother instead. Because his mother didn’t believe him. She thought he’d done something and wasn’t saying.” Miriam’s face did not do anything. “He had a plaster on his thumb. He said thank you. He’s fifty next month and he’s in C block.”

The stove said 23:41.

“If it’s read out,” she said, “Petrus Mahlangu is home by about March of 2056.”

“Yes.”

“And Nomsa Mahlangu has been alive for eight years, and I do not know whether those two sentences have anything to do with each other, and neither does Reader B, and neither did the magistrate who signed him last year, and neither do you.”

Motaung sat with that.

He had spent nineteen years being the person in every room who could say the operational thing when nobody else could get their mouth around it, and the operational thing here was that there was nothing operational to say. There was a page in his wife’s handwriting on a kitchen table, and it went in both directions with the same force, and no procedure he had ever written and no procedure anyone had ever written could take a step in it.

“You’d have to swear it,” he said. “The ledger’s worthless unless the Registrar of Findings stands up and says she copied it.”

“Yes.”

“That’s eleven years and a store you weren’t authorised to copy. That’s a custodial sentence and it’s not a short one.” He looked at the ten brown paper covers. “You’d go in.”

“Don’t put that in the sum,” Miriam said.

“It’s in the sum.”

“Then take it out.” She said it quite mildly. “I’ve had eleven years to decide about that part and I decided about it in the first month. It is

the only piece of this that is not your problem, and you're not having it."

"What do you want me to do?"

She did not answer.

He gave her the silence, because he was good at silences, and she outlasted it, because she had been outlasting his silences since 2020.

"Miriam. I'm asking you for your view."

"I know what you're asking me for."

"You have the only honest data in this country. You've had it for eleven years and nobody else has ever seen it, and I'm sitting here at midnight two days out and I am asking the one person with the numbers what the numbers say to do." He heard the shape of his own voice, and it was the shape he used at the Thursday management meeting, and he could not get out of it. "Give me a recommendation."

"No."

"That's not—"

"I've given you the count," Miriam said. "That's my part. I counted them because nobody was counting them. I did not count them so that I could tell my husband what to do with them."

"It's not an answer."

"It's the whole of my answer."

"Then answer me as the Registrar." He said it evenly. "Not as my wife. You are the custodian of the store, and I am a named person with a warrant out on me, and I am putting a question to the custodian about the contents of the store."

It was the worst thing he had said in that kitchen in thirty-four years, and he knew it while it was still coming out of him, and he said the rest of it anyway, because it was the last lever on the desk and his hand had gone to it the way his hand went to anything.

Miriam took it without moving at all.

"The Registrar files what she is given and issues what the Act permits and holds no opinion that goes on the record," she said. "You wrote that too. It's in the induction pack. Page nine."

He put both hands on the edge of the table. "Then tell me what you would do."

"Hayi." She shook her head once. "No. Because in a year, or in ten years, or on some afternoon neither of us can see from here, you'll be standing in whatever it is you're standing in, and you will think: she told me. And you'll be right. And then it'll be a thing that happened to you." She let that be flat. "It's not going to be a thing that happened to you."

"You've counted them," he said. "You must have a view."

"I have a view," Miriam said. "You're not getting it."

The stove said 23:58.

She stood up. She took the two cups to the sink and poured the cold tea out and ran water into them and left them standing in the water, because she had never in thirty-four years put a cup in a sink dry.

Then she came back past the table and stopped, and squared the current book to the edge again, one finger, the way you straighten a picture on your way out of a room. She did not close it. She did not take any of the other ten.

"Six o'clock," she said. "Ayesha hasn't signed. That gives you till she does."

"I know."

"Sleep or don't sleep. But don't sit here in the dark like a man in a film."

She went to the door, and reached back, and put on the light over the table, which was the good one, the long one he had fitted himself in 2044 because the ceiling light was no use for reading. Then she went up.

He heard the third stair, which had done that since before either of them worked in Struben Street.

Motaung sat under the light with the eleven books.

Six hours to row five. Whatever Ayesha did after that she would do on a Sunday, in her own time, with her own name on it, and he had trained her predecessor and her predecessor's predecessor and he knew exactly what that morning was going to feel like in her office and he could do nothing about that either.

His briefcase was in the passage where he had put it down.

He drew the stack of cash books towards him across the worn patch in the varnish, and took the bottom one, KONFYT 2043-44, out from under the others, and squared it in front of him, and opened it at the first page.

The first entry was dated 19 March 2043. It was a woman. She was thirty-three.

He began to read.

The Medical Aid

Day Five — Sunday 8 November 2054

Row five had unlocked at six o'clock that morning and by twenty past nine it had not fired.

He established this the way he would have established anything, which was by going and standing where the consequence would have been.

Row five was not a search. Row five was a reconstruction: ninety days of a life assembled out of everything the Republic already held, and the output was not a location, it was a list of *probable presences* ranked by hour of the week. He had sat in Benoni in 2040 and watched a systems analyst run it against a volunteer from the legal section and produce eleven places the man went and the times he went to them, including two that his wife had not known about. Sunday was the easiest day in the week to reconstruct. Sunday was church, family, one shop, and a route.

So at ten to eight Josiah Motaung stood on the pavement of Louis Botha Avenue in Waverley with a briefcase in his hand, three hundred metres from the Methodist church his wife had attended for twenty-six years, and watched the eight o'clock service go in.

Two hundred and forty people. A boy in the parking area doing something to a scooter. The same white Corolla that had been outside that church every Sunday since the Brownouts, belonging to a retired schoolteacher whose name he could not remember and whose knees he could. No second vehicle on the verge. No one sitting in a car with the engine off. Nobody at the top of Sussex where you would put a man if you wanted the whole approach.

He gave it forty minutes and the hymn came out through the doors and nothing happened at all.

Which meant that row five had unlocked on schedule and had not been signed, and a thing that unlocks and is not signed does not sit quietly. It sits on the operations desk with an amber flag on it, and every hour somebody senior has to look at that flag and decide again to do nothing.

Cassim.

He worked out what it was costing her while he walked, because it was arithmetic and arithmetic was available to him. She had put her refusal in writing on Thursday, which meant it existed, which meant it was discoverable, which meant that on the day it went wrong there would be a document with her name on it saying *not authorised* over a warrant for a man who had then done the thing the warrant said he would do. Naidoo would have to read that instruction out to the desk. Naidoo, nine years, who could not get a sentence out on Wednesday afternoon. There would be a duty log. There would be an entry every four hours, and each entry would say the same thing, and the entries would be initialised.

She was spending her career at the rate of about one hour per hour, and she was doing it in a building where eleven people on the registry floor could see her do it, and she had not phoned him once to be thanked for it.

He had been wrong about her on Wednesday in four seconds, out of five true facts, and he had been wrong with the full force of a man who is good at his job.

It was thirty-nine hours to midnight on Monday and twenty-three to nine o'clock, and the jacarandas on Louis Botha were three weeks past finished and the pods were coming, and the shops were shut, and it was already thirty degrees.

He was at the corner of Wordsworth when the phone Miriam had put in his coat pocket rang.

It had rung twice in two days and both times it had been her. He looked at the screen and it was a number with no name on it, and he let it go to nothing, and it rang again eleven seconds later, and he answered it and did not speak.

“Chief.”

Motaung stood still on the pavement.

“Where can I fetch you,” Lombard said.

The sentence was correct. It was the sentence Lombard had used for twenty-two years, in that order, without a question mark on the end of it. What was wrong with it was that it had been said too fast, the way a man says a line he has been holding in his mouth for an hour, and that behind it there was no engine noise at all. Dries Lombard made every call he had ever made from a moving vehicle.

“Where are you?”

“Parked.”

“Where.”

There was a pause of about a second and a half.

“Steve Biko,” Lombard said. “The parkade. Where they took you Friday.”

He walked in off the street at half past ten, up the vehicle ramp, because a man on foot on a vehicle ramp is visible for a hundred metres in both directions and can be seen not to be carrying anything but a briefcase.

Level two smelled of hot concrete and pigeons and the cold-water smell that comes off a drain in a structure that never gets sun. On Friday it had been the level below this one, and there had been four men in good suits and a woman with a clipboard, and she had given him a form headed INDEMNITY and a pen that worked, and a bottle of water out of a cooler bag, and one of the men had leaned across and fastened his seatbelt for him as if he were a grandfather being taken to a wedding. Nobody had touched him otherwise. Nobody had shown him a weapon. He had signed the form because a man with five days left takes the meeting.

Today it was one white Ford single cab with a company logo on the door, reversed into a bay near the wall, and Dries Lombard standing next to it.

He was standing.

That was the first thing and it took Motaung four steps to understand why he had noticed it. In twenty-two years Dries Lombard had never stood anywhere. He leaned. He sat on things that were not chairs, crates and tow hitches and the corners of desks, and when he was made to stand at a parade he stood like a man waiting for the parade to be over. He was standing now in the middle of an empty bay with his weight on both feet and his hands doing nothing at his sides, and the hands were the second thing, because they kept starting to go into his pockets and then not.

On the bonnet of the bakkie there was a Checkers packet with something in it, folded over twice.

Motaung stopped about four metres away, which was not a decision he made.

"Môre, Chief," Lombard said.

"Dries."

Lombard looked at the packet on the bonnet, and then at him, and said it.

"They sent me to kill you this morning."

The parkade had a fan somewhere on the level above and it came on, and ran for perhaps twenty seconds, and went off again.

"Sit," Motaung said.

"I'd rather stand."

"Sit down, Dries."

Lombard sat on the front wheel arch of his own vehicle, which was the first natural thing his body had done since Motaung came up the ramp, and put his forearms on his thighs.

Motaung did not sit. He put the briefcase down against the wall, out of the way, and stayed on his feet because he was going to ask questions and he had trained four hundred people that you take a statement standing if the man is sitting.

"When were you told."

"Twenty to twelve last night."

"By who."

"A number. It's always a number." Lombard rubbed his mouth. "But it's Beyers. Advocate Beyers's office does the instructions. He's their attorney, he's not — he doesn't say things like that. He said the Chief mustn't be at Sandton tomorrow and I said in what sense and he said in whatever sense you can manage before nine o'clock, Warrant Officer, and then he asked me if I understood, twice, because he wanted me to be the one who said the word."

"Did you say it."

"I said I understood."

"That's not the same thing."

"No, Chief. It isn't." Lombard looked at the concrete between his boots. "But it was."

"Why now."

"Because you've got the dissent." He said it flatly. "That's what I was told. The Director is in possession of a sealed document. Nothing else. I wasn't told how they know and I didn't ask and I don't want to know."

Motaung said nothing about Saturday night. He did not move his hand towards his coat, where a photocopy of one page of Finding B had been folded into four since twenty past eleven the previous evening, and he noticed himself not doing it, and understood that in nineteen years of interviewing people he had watched several hundred men not do exactly that.

"How was it supposed to look."

"Robbery." Lombard shrugged, and it was the whole-body shrug, the farmer's one, and it came out of him broken in the middle. "Parkade. Older man on his own. They said no plates, no house, nothing on a road with a gantry. Two shots and take the case and the phone and walk down the ramp." He turned his hands over. "It looks like the thing that happens four hundred times a year in this province and always has."

"The stranger and the sudden."

"Ja."

"They chose it because we can't see it."

"They didn't say that."

"They didn't have to," Motaung said. "It's in the annual report. Page nineteen. I signed the foreword."

Lombard nodded, twice, at the floor, and did not say anything, and the fan on the level above came on again.

"Anke," Motaung said.

The name went into Lombard like a needle going in, which is to say he took it well and it changed the colour of his face.

"Ja."

"How long."

"Diagnosed October 2051. Osteosarcoma, left femur, she was fourteen." He said it the way people say the things they have said to four hundred receptionists. "Limb salvage in the March. She had two clear years, Chief, two whole years, she played hockey again, badly, she was terrible. Then in April last year it came back in the lung and they took a piece out of her and now she's on a thing that isn't on the formulary."

"Not on the formulary at all, or exception?"

"At all. There's an exception application. You put it in in January and they decide in April and the answer was no in April and you can appeal and the appeal is in September." Lombard's voice went very slightly faster, and stayed there, the way a man goes faster over a piece of road he has driven every day for three years. "Thirty-eight thousand a cycle. Twenty-one days. So it's about six hundred and sixty a year, and the oncology benefit on the departmental scheme is four hundred and twelve thousand, and after that you carry twenty per cent of everything else, and everything else in a year like this is another two hundred and something. My salary is four hundred and eleven."

"I'm not saying it's a bad scheme," Lombard said. "It's a good scheme. My father was armed response for Trident in 2029 and when his back went they gave him a month and a half. Three years they've paid for that child. Surgery, radiation, the prosthetic, the psychologist. Three years, Chief. I'd have had nothing in 2029 and I know it and I say it to Ronel and she doesn't want to hear it."

Four hundred and twelve thousand.

Motaung stood in a parkade off Steve Biko Road and recognised a number the way you recognise a face across a street: not immediately, and then completely.

The staff scheme had been negotiated in 2038, when the Directorate had eleven hundred people and no history, and the actuary had come back with three options, and Motaung had taken the middle one because the top one would have cost him two hundred posts in a year when he was trying to get the uptake teams to two officers per vehicle instead of one. He had argued for it in front of the joint committee. He had used the word *sustainable*. The annual oncology cap had been three hundred thousand rand in 2038 and had been escalated by CPI every year since by a formula in an annexure, and it was, this year, four hundred and twelve.

Lombard was not looking at him.

Lombard had known that number since the October of 2051 and had sat next to him in a vehicle perhaps four hundred times since and had never once said it, and was not saying it now, and had chosen to say *the departmental scheme* instead of *your scheme*, which had cost him something in the middle of the worst sentence of his life.

"The first payment," Motaung said.

"Sixty thousand. December 2051." Lombard's hands went flat on his knees. "I wrote them an invoice. Security consulting, two days, site assessment. I've still got it. I did the VAT on it, Chief, I sat at my kitchen table and did the VAT calculation on it, because if there's an invoice then it's a thing a man does."

"And the second."

Lombard did not answer.

"Dries."

"There wasn't an invoice for the second one," he said.

The fan came on again.

"She wrote Physical Sciences Paper Two on Thursday," Lombard said. "She moved her cycle five days so it wouldn't land on it. She did that herself. She's got the exam timetable on the back of the fridge and she worked out the days and she phoned the oncology unit herself and moved it and then told us afterwards." He made a sound that was not a laugh. "She wants to do quantity surveying. Not medicine, not law. Quantity surveying. I don't know where she got it. Ronel says her uncle."

"Is she in remission."

"No."

"Then what is the treatment for."

"Time," Lombard said.

Motaung had run five hundred interviews and he knew what the next question was and he asked it, because it was the operational question and it was his.

"Is there a second man."

"Not for today." Lombard put his hands on his knees again. "It was me because I'm the one who can get within a metre of you and you won't move. That's not a compliment, Chief, that's a selection criterion, I wrote it in a module. If it doesn't happen today, then it doesn't happen, because after nine o'clock tomorrow it doesn't matter."

"What happens at nine o'clock tomorrow."

"The general stands up," Lombard said. "That's all I know. He stands up and he's got the document and after that you can say anything you like to anybody you like, because he'll have said it first."

Then he stood up off the wheel arch and went to the bonnet and picked up the Checkers packet, and Motaung saw his shoulders change and knew exactly what was going to happen next, and did not move, and afterwards could not have said why he did not move.

Lombard unwrapped it. It was a Vektor, an old one, clean, with the serial number still on it, which told Motaung more about the people who had supplied it than anything Lombard had said. He held it down along his right leg. He got the safety off with his thumb.

Then he stood there.

Twenty-two years and he had qualified every year and shot expert in four of them, and he stood in an empty bay in a parkade with a firearm at the end of his arm, and the arm did not come up.

His hand started to shake at about eight seconds. Not dramatically. It shook the way a man's hand shakes when he has been holding a wallpaper roller above his head for a long time, a fine fast tremor, and the slide tapped twice against his belt buckle, and his breathing went to the top of his chest and stayed there.

"Dries," Motaung said.

Lombard turned around and walked four steps to the pillar and was sick against it.

Motaung stood where he was. There was nothing to be done about it and going to him would have been a thing done for himself. He looked at the ramp and the exits, because that was what he had, and there was nobody on any of them.

When it was finished Lombard stayed leaning on the pillar with one forearm for a while. Then he came back and bent down and put the pistol on the concrete in the middle of the bay, and stepped away from it, two paces, and stood with his hands at his sides and his back not straight.

"I can't," he said. "It's not — Chief, I want you to understand that I got as far as the safety."

"I saw."

"I've been telling myself since twenty to twelve last night that I'd get it done and then I'd sort out the rest of my life afterwards. I've had eleven hours. I made a plan." He wiped his mouth with the back of his wrist. "And then you came up the ramp with the case in the wrong hand, because of the hip, and my arm wouldn't."

Motaung did not tell him what that was worth. He had a fair idea and

it was not much. A body has vetoes in it that a man has not earned and does not own.

"You should take me in," Lombard said.

"With what."

Lombard looked up.

Motaung ran it anyway, because he could not stop himself running procedures; he had been doing it in the back of his head since the man sat down. Section eighteen, attempted contravention, plus the corruption charge, which was the real one. You take him to the SAPS station on Pretorius Street, eleven minutes on foot. You ask the constable at the counter to open a docket. And at that counter the whole thing falls over, because everything after the first sentence requires somebody to believe that the man standing at the counter with no firearm, no identity card, no radio, no vehicle and no station commander is the Director of Preventive Enforcement, and there is an anticipatory warrant out for him, and the only person in the province currently acting as though Josiah Motaung had any authority at all was standing three metres away in a parkade with vomit on his boot.

"I locked my card in my drawer on Wednesday," he said.

"Ja."

"There isn't a counter in this country I can walk up to, Dries."

Lombard nodded slowly. Then he said, "Somebody's going to have to do something about me."

"Yes."

"But not you. And not today."

"No."

They stood there. Somewhere below them a car started and went out through the boom and the boom clattered down, and a radio in the attendant's booth was playing gospel because it was Sunday.

Lombard looked at the pistol on the floor and did not pick it up. He looked at his own hands, and then at the ramp, and then at nothing much.

"Right," he said, in the voice he used to end a shift.

He opened the door of the bakkie. Then he stopped with his hand on the top of the frame.

"Do you want a lift?"

"No," Motaung said.

"Ja," Lombard said. "No. Fair enough."

He knocked twice on the roof with his knuckle, which he had done before getting into every vehicle he had ever driven, including a Corolla in Katlehong in thirty-four degrees, and got in, and reversed out, and put his indicator on for a turn nobody was going to contest, and drove down the ramp.

Motaung stood in the diesel smell and listened to the tyres go around and around the levels until they stopped.

Then he went and picked up the pistol, because you do not leave a firearm lying on the floor of a public parkade, and he cleared it and checked the chamber and put it back in the Checkers packet, and put the packet in the briefcase on top of the Ngobese docket, and closed the catches.

Twenty-two hours to nine o'clock.

He took the stairs.

The Recursion

Day Five — Sunday 8 November 2054

The chair had been sinking since June and she had stopped fighting it.

That was the actual cause, and she knew it, and knowing it did not help. Not the tube above the second desk, which had been strobing since Thursday and had a job number. Not the water, which came out of the cooler tasting of the cooler. Her knees sat higher than her hips for nine hours at a stretch, and the load went up the back of her neck and arrived behind her right eye somewhere around the fourth hour, and it was now the fifth.

The replacement-chair requisition had been in the system since March.

Karabo Ntuli put her thumb into the muscle at the base of her skull, held it while she counted to twenty, and opened the next file.

Sunday was roster, not overtime. Homicide did not observe the Sabbath and neither did the queue; the province produced its antecedents seven days a week, and the difference on a Sunday was only that the canteen was shut, the lift lobby was dark, and there was nobody upstairs to answer a query, so you learned to write your queries down and send them on Monday.

This Sunday there was one other difference, and it had been sitting across the top of her terminal since 05:00 in the flat capitals the system used when it wanted no argument:

SCHEDULED MIGRATION IN PROGRESS — 2049 ARCHIVE TO LONG STORE. SUITE C REFRESH DEFERRED. DATA CURRENT

TO 04h12.

Five years of sealed and superseded findings were being moved off the working store onto tape somewhere in Centurion, which was a retention obligation and had been on the systems calendar since June, and which had eaten the refresh window. Systems had said an hour. At 07:00 they had said another hour. At 09:20 a man whose name she did not have had typed *apols, 20 min* into the standing channel, and it was now twenty past eleven.

So the two suites either side of her were dark. The Sunday roster ran one Reader when the platform was degraded, and this month the one was C.

She had a headache and a queue of four and no Panados in her bag, and she opened MABUZA, Solomon Khanyisa, 47, of Vereeniging, and did her job.

He had a panel shop off Voortrekker with two employees and a lease he was behind on. The anticipated was his wife's brother, over a Hilux, a loan agreement written by hand in 2052, and eleven months of a family talking itself into a corner. The stack gave her the band and the salience list and the ninety-day retrospective in the order it always gave them, and the band was tight and the salience ran the way it runs when a man has stopped asking and started arranging.

None of that was the question. The stack did not know Solomon Mabuza and would have said so if you could ask it. The stack knew that of the men whose previous ninety days looked like his, in this province, at this density of contact, a great many had gone on to do the thing, and it knew how tightly. What a Reader carried was the other part, the part the Act put a human signature on because a machine's signature would not have got through Parliament: whether the man had *decided*. Whether the arrangements were the arrangements of a man who was still arguing with himself or the arrangements of a man who had finished.

She read it twice. She thought he had finished. He had bought the wrong thing, in the wrong place, in cash, on a Tuesday afternoon when the shop was open.

She moved to file, and the box came up.

I acknowledge that this finding is made on operational data

current to 04h12 on 08 Nov 2054.

She looked at it for a while with her thumb still on her neck.

It was nothing. It was a tick box. There had been deferred refreshes before and there would be more and the acknowledgement existed so that if anything went wrong later there would be a record of a person having been told. She had ticked it four times in three years without reading it.

But she was careful, which was the whole of what she was, and *current to 04h12* was seven hours ago and the man was in Vereeniging doing whatever he was doing this morning, and she wanted to know, procedurally, what a deferred refresh was held to invalidate and what it was not.

So she opened the standing instruction.

It was where standing instructions are, three clicks in from a page nobody looks at, under a heading that had not been redesigned since the platform went in.

DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTIVE ENFORCEMENT - SYSTEMS
STANDING INSTRUCTION SI-11/3 · READER SUITE DATA REFRESH
Version 4 · effective 15 Nov 2049 · supersedes Version 3

3.1 Scheduled refresh, operational record and derived features:

SUITE A	04h00
SUITE B	08h00
SUITE C	12h30

3.2 Ingest cut-off is T-30 minutes. Records entered after cut-off carried to the following scheduled refresh.

3.3 Where a scheduled refresh is deferred, the Reader shall acknowledge data currency on each finding filed until the refresh completes.

She read 3.3, which answered her question, and 3.2, which she already knew, and then she read 3.1, which she had never seen.

She had never seen it because there had never been any reason to

see it. Her refresh was at half past twelve. It had been at half past twelve since her first week, the way the tea trolley came at ten and the tube above the second desk strobed. She had not known there was a table. She had certainly not known that the table had the other two suites in it.

That was the first strange thing, and it was strange in a small administrative way: she was not permitted to know anything about A and B. Not their names, not their rosters, not their throughput, not one word they had ever filed. Nineteen years of a sealing regime built to keep three people from contaminating each other, and here on page four of a systems document was a table with all three of them on it, published to every terminal in the building, because a refresh schedule is not a finding. It is plumbing. Nobody redacts plumbing.

Karabo looked at the three times.

Four. Eight. Half past twelve.

Then she sat back, and the chair went down two centimetres the way it did, and she said, out loud, in an empty room, "No, man."

She got up and filled the kettle because standing helped, and while it boiled she did it properly, on paper, in the back of the hardcover notebook, which was a disciplinary offence under clause 9 of her contract and had been for two years.

The notebook had four columns and a fifth with nothing at the top of it. She turned to a clean page and wrote out what she knew, and she was careful to write only what she actually knew, because she had been trained by an examiner who failed you for reasoning off a thing you had assumed.

The stacks ingest the operational record. That was not an inference. It was the first module. The Directorate acts on the world; the acts change the world; a stack that cannot see its own institution's footprint is worse than nothing, and there was a 2049 finding to that effect that got quoted at every induction. She used the operational record every working hour. It was in every evidence base she had ever read: warrants served, orders renewed, uptakes executed, applications refused. It sat in the salience list with everything else and sometimes it sat near the top.

A finding enters the operational record when it is distributed. Also not an inference. She had seen distribution entries in her own evidence bases hundreds of times. A distribution is an act of the Directorate, and the Directorate records its acts, and the record is the feature set. There was no wall between those sentences. There had never been anywhere to put one.

The suites refresh at four, at eight, and at half past twelve.

The daily distribution goes out at six.

The kettle clicked off behind her and she did not hear it.

Suite A computed at four in the morning and Grace — she did not know the name, she had never known the name, she wrote A — filed at some point after that, and the finding went out on the six o'clock distribution.

Which meant it was in the record by five past six.

Which meant it was through the ingest cut-off with an hour and twenty-five minutes to spare.

Which meant that when B refreshed at eight, the man in B's file was a man against whom a finding had been distributed.

Karabo stood with her hand flat on the counter next to a kettle that had boiled, and worked it through the other way to see if it would break, because that was also what she was.

Maybe distribution entries were held out of the Reader feature set. She checked. They were not; she had one in front of her in the Mabuza evidence base, an unrelated warrant on an associate, sitting at position eleven with a weight on it. Maybe the cut-off was longer than 3.2 said. She checked; it was not. Maybe the record entry was thin, a flag and a timestamp with no content. She checked one, from June, on a subject she had assessed in a different case, and it was not thin. It had the subject's response in it. Of course it did. What a named person does in the hours after he is named is exactly the kind of behaviour the instrument was built to weigh, and it is weighed, and there is nothing improper about weighing it.

It would not break.

She wrote it in the notebook in her ordinary handwriting.

A assesses a man who does not know. B assesses a man who has been told. C assesses a man who has been told, and who has had six hours of being told.

She looked at the three lines for some time.

Then she wrote, underneath, *these are not the same man*, and put the pen down, and went and made the tea she no longer wanted.

The statute said two of three.

She had recited it in her assessment at the end of her first year, in a room upstairs with two people from Standards and a video camera. *A finding of anticipated homicide is made where two of three Readers concur.* She had been word-perfect and slightly bored, because it was the easy part of the paper.

Concur meant agree. Agreeing was a thing two people could only do about the same question.

Karabo took her tea back to the terminal and pulled her own case, because a Reader may read her own filed findings, which is the one thing they may read.

GP/2054/11-0883-C. Filed Wednesday, 14:02. Four days ago. The window on it closed tomorrow night at midnight.

She had been proud of it. She could admit that now with her ears going hot. It was the cleanest thing she had ever filed. Everything in it had pointed the same way and the band had come back so tight it had made her sit up, and she had written into the intent field the sentence she had spent three years wanting a case good enough to justify: *assessed complete, and assessed as reasoned.*

She opened the evidence base and went down it slowly, and there they were, where they had been on Wednesday, where she had read them and weighted them and moved on.

An entry timestamped 06:00: distribution.

An entry at 07:15, and another at 08:01, which was the subject attending a scheduled internal meeting and leaving it on time.

An entry at 12:14: an application for disclosure under s.14(6), made by the subject, declined.

An entry at 12:00: a finding sealed on the same registry number.

She had seen all of it. She had used all of it. The whole tight, beautiful band on GP/2054/11-0883-C had been tight because the man in it was moving with the specific economy of somebody who has read something. That was the shape she had found so legible. That was the *reasoned* in her intent field.

And there had been a dissent. She had known that on Wednesday, from the decline entry, the way you know from a form reference that a form exists; she had noted it as a feature and had not once asked herself what it said, because asking was not a thing a Reader did, and it would not have helped her, and the file was the file.

She sat with her hands in her lap.

The forecast that had come back to her on Wednesday afternoon had priced in a man who held both documents. Not one. Both. The intent profile did not resolve any other way; she had run it, she knew where it came apart. Her stack had computed a man reading a sealed finding that the Act said he could not be shown, and had returned a band on it, and she had signed the band, and the seal had held all the way through, and none of that had been a contradiction to anybody, because nobody in the chain had ever been asked to hold two of those facts at the same time.

The headache had gone somewhere else. She was aware of that the way you are aware of a tooth stopping.

She went to the notebook because the notebook was the only place she had ever been able to put anything.

Two years of it. One thousand six hundred and six lines, date and registry stub and her call and her band and one word for the shape of the thing, *closing, closed in on, loud, flat*. And the fifth column with nothing at the top of it, which she had ruled in her second month and had never filled in and never would, because on Thursday she had asked, in writing, to be told the outcome of one finding, any finding, her choice, from three years ago, and the refusal had come back in

fifty minutes on a template with a reference number six digits long, and she had copied the number into the back of the book and sat looking at it for the rest of the shift.

She counted the dissents. She did not have to count; she knew; she counted anyway, on paper, twice.

A hundred and forty-one.

A hundred and forty-one times in two years she had read a file and found intent absent and filed against, and a hundred and forty-one times the finding had gone out of her hands and she had never learned what happened next, and in some number of those cases — she could not know the number, but it was not zero and it was not small — the other two had concurred and a warrant had issued and a person had gone to Doringkop on two votes out of three.

Two votes. Cast at four in the morning and at eight, about a man who did not know and a man who did.

She was C. She had always been C. Every single file she had ever touched had come to her at half past twelve, after the six o'clock distribution, after whatever B had done at eight; every subject she had ever assessed had been assessed by her last, and by her alone in a world where the machine had already spoken once about him. Every one. One thousand six hundred and six lines and not one of them an exception, because the exception was not possible, because it was in the table on page four.

They had told her at the end of her first year that she had the best calibration in the history of the programme. It had been said to her by a woman from Standards who had shaken her hand.

Calibration was agreement. That was all it had ever been. There was no outcome to calibrate against; there was paragraph four; the whole apparatus of scoring a Reader rested on how often she landed where the other two landed.

She landed where they landed because she went last.

Karabo Ntuli sat in a chair that would not hold its height, in a sealed room in a basement on Struben Street, with a cup of tea she had not drunk, and understood that she was the best Reader in the programme's history in the sense that a man who copies the answer is

the best pupil in the class.

She wanted to know who to complain to.

That was the actual, small, practical impulse, and she followed it, and it took her back to SI-11/3 and down past 3.3 and past the appendices, to the foot of the document, where change-controlled instruments carry the thing that makes them lawful.

CHANGE HISTORY

V4 Staggers suite refresh (was: all suites 04h00) across the wor
 distribute platform queue load and reduce overnight batch lat
 No change to feature set. No change to policy.

RAISED BY	MOKOENA, T.	Systems Manager, Reader Platfor
CHANGE BOARD	11 Nov 2049.	Batch 2049/11-B. Item 31 of 40
COUNTERSIGNED	MOTAUNG, J.T.	Director

No change to policy.

Before the fifteenth of November 2049, all three suites had refreshed at four in the morning. All three. The same record, the same cut-off, the same man. Three people answering one question about one person, which is what the statute had been written for and what everybody upstairs still believed was happening.

It had lasted fourteen years and it had been taken out on a Thursday to reduce overnight batch latency, and T. Mokoena had raised it, and it had gone to a board with thirty-nine other things, and it was item thirty-one.

Karabo read the last line again.

MOTAUNG, J.T.

She had typed those five letters on Wednesday. MOTAUNG, JOSIAH THABO. She had noticed the surname the way you notice a surname, which is to say she had thought *there are four Motaungs in my mother's street* and put a small question mark in the notebook and assessed the file, because the file is the file and a Reader who starts

wondering about who her subjects are is a Reader who has to be replaced, and replacing one takes four years.

She turned her chair around.

On the wall behind her, in a clip frame with the cardboard insert still behind the certificate, was the thing they gave you at induction. DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTIVE ENFORCEMENT. *This is to certify that NTULI, KARABO NOMTHANDAZO has been admitted to the office of Reader, 6 March 2051.* And underneath, in the printed script they used, a signature, and under the signature, in eight point:

J. T. MOTAUNG DIRECTOR

It had been on that wall, forty centimetres above the back of her head, for three years and eight months.

She stood up. The chair went down.

She took the notebook, which she should not have done, and opened the door of Suite C, which she should not have done either.

The corridor was cream to waist height and cream above it in a different cream, and the strip lights were on because they were always on, and there were three doors. She had walked past two of them twice a day for three years and had never once looked at them for longer than it takes to walk past a door.

SUITE A. SUITE B. No names. There would never be names.

Both dark at the gap underneath.

She knocked on B anyway, twice, and then a third time with the flat of her hand, and stood there with her ear near the wood listening to a room with nobody in it. The Sunday roster ran one Reader. She had read the roster herself on Friday.

Twelve metres. She had worked twelve metres from that man, or that woman, for three years and eight months, and this was the first time she had touched the door.

Against the wall between B and the lift lobby stood a trolley of chairs. Six of them, stacked, the good kind with the lever on the right, still in their plastic. They had been there since the first week of September.

There was a delivery note taped to the top one and a printed sheet under the tape which said, in the flat capitals, HOLD — AWAITING RELEASE INSTRUCTION.

She went past them into the lobby and pressed the button for the ground floor and put her card against the reader.

The reader made the short unhappy noise.

She did it again, slowly, the way people do, and it made the noise again, and she looked at her own card in her hand and saw it properly for the first time in three years: **NTULI K.N. — READER — LEVEL B1** and a strip of blue that was not the strip of blue that everybody upstairs had.

The fire stairs were around the corner and the fire stairs were not carded, because you cannot card a fire escape. She went up them fast with the notebook under her arm and got a floor and a half before she reached the door at the top, which had a green push bar and a small hard sign at eye level: **THIS DOOR IS ALARMED.**

She stood on the landing with her hand up on the bar and did not push it, and she was still standing there like that when she heard him coming up behind her.

Bheki Zwane had been on the suite escort since 2046 and did the Sunday because the Sunday paid an extra sixty per cent, and he came up the stairs the way a man of forty-four comes up stairs, without hurrying, one hand on the rail.

“Ntuli.”

“Bheki.”

“Hhayi.” He stopped four steps down, which she understood afterwards was a thing he had been taught, and he was slightly out of breath, and he had his tea in his other hand. He had a bad tooth on the right side and had been eating on the left since Wednesday and had an appointment on Tuesday which he had mentioned to her twice. “What are you doing?”

“I need to talk to somebody.”

“On a Sunday?”

"I need to talk to somebody today."

He looked at her, and then up at the door with the green bar, and then at her again, and what came into his face was not suspicion. It was embarrassment, and it was on her behalf, and it was much worse.

"That one is alarmed."

"I know."

"So." He came up two of the four steps and stopped again. "Come. I'll walk with you."

They went back down. He kept himself half a step behind her all the way, which was also a thing he had been taught, and neither of them said anything through the lobby. She had the notebook under her arm the whole time, the hardcover, the disciplinary offence, and he looked at it once the way you look at a book somebody is carrying, and he did not ask.

At the door of Suite C he said, "You know I have to write it."

"I know."

"It's not me, it's the log. The door opens, the log has it, and then Monday somebody asks me and I must have written something." He shifted his tea to his other hand. "What must I put?"

"Put that I was unwell."

Bheki Zwane nodded slowly, and she could see him deciding that this was true, because it was, and because he liked her, and because the box on the form was one line long.

"Ntuli." He put his hand into his shirt pocket and came out with a strip of Panado with four left in it, and pressed out two, and held them out to her on his palm. "Your eyes are doing that thing."

She took them.

"Drink water," he said. "That cooler is rubbish but drink it."

The suite door closed behind her with the sound it made.

SCHEDULED MIGRATION IN PROGRESS — SUITE C REFRESH DEFERRED. DATA CURRENT TO 04h12.

Nobody was coming. That was the shape of the afternoon and she saw it clearly and without any drama at all: there was no person in this building on a Sunday to whom this could be said, and on Monday there would be a person, and on Monday she would say it to a supervisor who would raise it with Systems, and Systems would look at SI-11/3 and confirm that the platform was operating to specification, which it was, and had been since 2049, in accordance with a change that had been properly raised, properly boarded, and properly countersigned.

There was nothing wrong. That was the thing. She turned it over four or five times looking for the wrong part and every part was right.

The window on GP/2054/11-0883 closed tomorrow at midnight.

Karabo sat down and the chair went down and she let it.

She pulled her own finding up on the screen, and it opened with the fields in the order they were always in, and near the bottom, where the form had always had the field because a form has fields, was the one that every finding she had ever seen in three years and eight months carried the same three letters in.

READER'S NOTE: None.

A Reader may annotate her own finding at any time before the expiry of the window. It was in the same contract as clause 9. She had never met anybody who had used it.

She typed with the notebook shut on the desk beside her and she did not draft it first, because she had been assembling it for four hours and, before that, without knowing what she was assembling, for most of two years.

READER'S NOTE: The subject will have read the two findings above the acts. I have been asked what he will do. I have answered what he does. I do not believe this is a prediction and I am asking, in writing, what he will do.

She read it once and did not change anything and pressed the key.

APPENDED. GP/2054/11-0883-C. ROUTED: REGISTRY OF FINDINGS.

It would print with the finding. That was how annotations printed; they came up under the intent field as though they had always been there, over Wednesday's date and Wednesday's time, so that anybody

who ever pulled the file would take it for something she had thought of at two o'clock on the afternoon she signed.

At 13:40 the migration finished and the banner cleared and her refresh came through, and the file on Solomon Mabuza of Vereeniging re-ran on current data and came back where it had been.

She took Bheki's two Panados with a cup of water that tasted of the cooler.

Then she ticked the box, and filed him, and opened the next one.

The Man Who Read It

Day Five — Sunday 8 November 2054

Two things had been scheduled to happen at six o'clock that morning and only one of them had.

Row five had unlocked on time. Somewhere in a rack in the basement of a building he had argued into existence, a permission had come up green and had sat there all day waiting for a Deputy Director's signature, which had not come, because Ayesha Cassim had put a written instruction on the operations desk on Thursday and had not withdrawn it.

The other thing was the address watch, and it had come off.

He had written that standing instruction in 2038 and could still recite the reasoning. An address watch on an outstanding execution runs forty-eight hours and then folds into the plate estate, because the yield after forty-eight hours is four in a thousand and the watch costs four officers a shift, and the design target is ninety-four per cent within forty-eight hours in any event. Two vehicles had sat on the Waverley house from six on Thursday morning until six on Saturday morning. He had watched the second one leave from the corner of Umgeni Road with a bag of oranges in his hand, and had gone in through his own kitchen door eleven hours later.

So the reason a named man could sit in his own study on a Sunday evening was the same reason he had been at liberty for four days, which was that in 2036 he had refused to build a country that caught everybody.

The study was hot. It faced west and the burglar bars held the afternoon in the glass long after the sun had gone off the roofs. He

opened the window and got the sprinkler next door and a dog and somebody's radio, and he sat down at the desk with two sheets of paper on it.

Both of them were handwritten.

The one on the left was in his own hand, on a page torn from the pad in the kitchen drawer, and it was Finding A, written out at half past three that afternoon from memory. He had read the six o'clock distribution every working morning for nineteen years. The form was in his hands the way a hymn is in the hands of a man who has stopped going to church. Registry number, filed time, Reader. Subject. Anticipated victim. Window. Prior contact. Finding. Intent formation. Reader's note.

He had checked it twice and found one error, which was that he had put the suffix on the wrong side of the registry number, and he had corrected it, because a document with an error in it is not a document.

The one on the right was in Miriam's hand, in the blue pen from the telephone table, and she had written it out for him at the kitchen table last night while he stood behind her chair and watched her do it, and it had taken her four minutes because she wrote out sealed findings for a living and did it with the pen off the paper between fields, the way she had been taught in 2043 by a woman who had since died.

The subject will not cause the death of the named person.

The subject will remove himself from the window and will not be within reach of the named person at any point during it.

Intent formation: assessed absent.

He put a clean sheet in front of him and took the cap off the pen.

There was a correct order of operations for this too.

When two Readers disagree, the first thing you do is not ask which of them is right. The first thing you do is establish that they were shown the same thing, because in eleven cases out of ten it is an ingestion fault and somebody in analytics is going to have a bad Monday.

He wrote *variance* at the top of the sheet, and under it he wrote the three ordinary explanations, in the order in which the guidance note required them to be tested.

Reader error. He had signed off on the variance statistics every quarter since 2035 and he knew what a dissent looked like. A dissent is a hedge. A dissent says *intent formation: assessed incomplete, or insufficient, or, in the worst-drafted ones, not established on the material*. A dissent is a Reader declining to put a signature on a deprivation of liberty, and it is written like a man stepping back from an edge.

Finding B did not step back from anything. Finding B said *will not*. Finding B said *will remove himself*. Finding B was a positive behavioural forecast with a subject, a verb and a direction, and it was more specific than Finding A.

He struck out *Reader error*.

Data fault. A stack running on a corrupted feature set produces garbage of a characteristic kind: it goes vague, or it goes wild, and either way analytics catches it on the reconciliation within a fortnight. Van Wyk would have raised it. Van Wyk raised things for sport. Nobody had raised anything.

He struck that out too.

The third explanation was that the document in his wife's handwriting was not a copy of anything, and that Miriam Motaung had sat at a kitchen table and invented a finding to give her husband something to hold.

He looked at that line for a while.

Then he struck it out, and did not spend a second sentence on it, because a man who has been married for thirty-four years and needs two sentences for that has not been married for thirty-four years.

That left him with two documents about the same man, on the same day, in the same building, that did not disagree in tone or confidence or degree, and could not both be about the same man.

He underlined *the same man* and then, because he did not like the look of it, he underlined it again.

He turned the sheet over and drew a column down the left-hand side, and put times in it, because that was how he had thought about every problem he had ever solved and he was too old to start thinking another way.

04:11. Filed, Reader A.

06:00. Distributed.

08:00. Suite B refresh.

09:40. Filed, Reader B. Dissent.

12:00. Sealed under section fourteen sub-six. Entered.

12:30. Suite C refresh.

14:02. Filed, Reader C. Concurrence. Warrant.

He did not have to look any of it up. He had signed the refresh schedule and he had watched the status line change on his own terminal at fourteen minutes past twelve and again at two minutes past two, and at two minutes past two something small at the back of his head had lodged an objection and had not been able to say what it was objecting to. It had been sitting there since Wednesday like a stone in a shoe he had not taken off.

He looked at the column.

Between the first entry and the third, one thing had happened in the world. At six o'clock the finding had gone out on distribution to eleven duty desks, an operations chief, a Deputy Director, and the man it was about.

Between the third entry and the sixth, one thing had happened. At twelve the dissent had been sealed and entered.

The Directorate's own operational record goes into the feature set. It had to. In 2049 an audit had established that a stack blind to its own institution's behaviour was worse than useless, because the institution was the largest single cause of change in the environment it was being asked to forecast, and a model that cannot see the biggest thing in the room will hallucinate a smaller one. He had read the audit.

He had funded the remediation. He had told the portfolio committee about it in a sentence he had been pleased with at the time.

A finding enters the operational record when it is distributed.

He put the pen down and took his reading glasses off and pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes until he saw the colours, and then he put the glasses back on.

In his jacket pocket, folded in four, was a garage slip from a Total in Rosslyn with something written on the back of it on Friday afternoon at a borrowed terminal in a municipal office with the power off in half the building. He had written it down because he wrote things down. He had not understood it and he had not tried to, and he had gone back to looking for the frame.

CC/2049/0771 — suite refresh sched, A/B/C — raised T. Mokoena, sys mgr — queue load — item 31 of 40 — appr. 11 Nov 2049 — countersigned JTM.

Item thirty-one of a batch of forty. A Thursday. He had no memory of it whatsoever and neither would any man alive, because approving a batch of forty change controls is what a director does between a budget meeting and a funeral.

Before that change the three suites had refreshed together.

He sat in the study with the sprinkler going next door and worked out, in the flat way he would have worked out a staffing model, that there had not been a majority in this country since November 2049, because a majority requires three people to be asked the same question, and for five years the plumbing had been asking them three.

It took him about ninety seconds and it did not feel like anything.

That was the part he would have expected to feel. Eleven thousand three hundred and forty-seven people at Doringkop, and Miriam's four hundred and nine, and every two-to-one warrant since 2049 hanging off a two-line entry in a change-control log with his initials on it, and he sat there and felt nothing at all, because there was a worse thing on the desk and it was closer.

He picked the pen up.

Stack B had refreshed at eight o'clock on Wednesday morning and had computed a man who had been told.

That was the whole of it. Finding A described a man who did not know. Finding B described a man who had read his own name on a distribution list at twenty past six, and a man who has read his own name on a distribution list does not go anywhere near a public gathering in Sandton on Monday morning, because he is sixty-one and not an idiot. *The subject will remove himself from the window.* It was not a dissent. It was a forecast about a different man, and it was correct, and Wynand Loots or whoever sat in Suite B had carried the intent on it and signed it at twenty to ten and gone to lunch.

So what did Stack C have at half past twelve that Stack B had not had at eight.

He wrote the question out in full and underneath it he wrote the answer, which was one item long.

At twelve o'clock a sealed dissent had entered the record against the name Motaung, Josiah Thabo.

Sealed meant not disclosed to the subject. Sealed did not mean absent. Sealed was a field, and the field was in the record, and the record went in.

He made himself do the next part properly.

A stack does not know what a man will read. A stack computes what a man like him will come into possession of, and it does that off the record, and the record on this particular man was thirty-five years deep and included his employment history, his delegations, his three lines of Director's access to the sealed store, and a field in his personnel file that had been completed in 2021 by a clerk in Kempton Park and had said the same thing ever since.

SPOUSE: MOTAUNG, M.J. (née Sithebe).

And another field, in another system, that said Registrar of Findings.

It did not need to guess. It did not need to see anything. It needed a marriage certificate and an organogram, and the Republic had both, and had had both for nineteen years, filed correctly, by people doing their jobs.

Stack C at half past twelve on Wednesday had computed a man who was going to read the dissent.

He was that man. He had become that man at ten past nine last night, standing behind a kitchen chair, watching his wife's pen move.

The stone came out of the shoe then. Four days it had been in there, and it had never been objecting to Reader C at all. It had been objecting to two minutes past two: a concurrence filed ninety-two minutes after a refresh on a schedule he had signed, about a file that had changed at midday. He had known on Wednesday afternoon that the timings were wrong. He had simply had nowhere to put the knowledge, so his head had held it for him, the way a man holds a thing for somebody at a funeral and finds it in his pocket a week later.

He turned to a clean sheet and did the thing he had trained four intakes of officers to do, which is to put the intent question to the subject and answer it in the subject's own material, without charity and without malice, and to write the answer down before you decide whether you like it.

What does a man do who has read the sealed finding.

He drew a line down the middle of the page.

On the left he wrote what Finding B told him to do, which was to remove himself. Go to ground until midnight on Monday. Drink water, sit in a room, let the window close. He was inside the six per cent and the six per cent held until row five, and row five was inert as long as Cassim held the line, and Cassim would hold it until Tuesday out of sheer stubbornness and then sign it because she was not a criminal.

And the sealed finding would still exist on Tuesday.

He wrote the consequence out because he had spent Saturday night writing it out with Miriam and it had not got smaller overnight. The dissent survives. The dissent is the one document in the Republic that proves the concurrence test does not test concurrence. Grobler's founding affidavit is two hundred and sixty pages long and thin in exactly one place and they have said in correspondence that they will amplify. It goes to a full bench inside eighteen months. Section fourteen sub-six falls, and the warrants fall with it, and the gates at Doringkop open for eleven thousand three hundred and forty-seven people.

Miriam had given him a range on Saturday for how many of those had been correctly named. She had been counting for eleven years and she was the only person alive with any basis for a number, and she had said it once, flatly, and had not softened either end of it.

On the right he wrote what Finding A said.

A public gathering. A firearm. Monday.

And the consequence of that, which was that a named man fulfils his finding in front of three broadcast crews and four hundred delegates, and the constitutional case loses the living face it was going to be argued around, and the sealing regime holds, and the machine goes on doing what it does, which is to keep Constance Baloyi's neighbours alive and to take Constance Baloyi off her landing in Tembisa at twenty past six in the morning in front of her son while a man on the stairs claps once and stops.

Both columns were true. Neither of them was an argument. He had spent nineteen years being able to hold both of those and had built a directorate out of the holding, and it had never once cost him anything until this week.

He looked at the two columns for a long time and then he did the arithmetic that was actually in front of him, which was that a stack refreshing at half past twelve on Wednesday had been computing a man with these two columns in front of him on a Sunday evening in November.

Not a man who might kill. A man who had been shown both futures and had been left to choose between them with the clock running, and who had, at some point on Wednesday afternoon, been assessed.

He took a clean sheet, and he wrote out the third finding.

He did it in the form, in the field order, in the flat Republic English he had been reading and drafting since he was thirty-eight. Registry number with the suffix on the correct side. Filed 04 Nov 2054 14:02. Reader C. Subject. Anticipated victim. Window. Finding. Intent formation.

It took him four minutes, and when he read it back he could not find anything in it to correct.

At the bottom of the page there was one field left, and he filled it in the way it had been filled on the other two sheets on the desk.

READER'S NOTE: None.

He had nothing to ask.

He did not tear the sheet up. He squared it against the other two and put all three under the glass paperweight from the 2041 conference, and then he took the pad and turned to a new page and started a different list.

Congress opens 09:00.

Sandton Convention Centre. Hall 2, was Hall 2 in '51.

Two liaison officers every year. The list is a list.

Delegate registration from 07:30. Coffee urns at the back, they are always at the back.

Fourteen hours to nine o'clock. Twenty-nine to midnight.

He wrote for eleven minutes. It was the same hand and the same pen and the same pad, and there was no paragraph in his head anywhere about whether the machine was right, because that was a question for a tribunal and there was not going to be a tribunal, and it had stopped being interesting at about the point where he wrote out the third finding and could not fault it.

Miriam came to the door of the study at ten past seven. He knew it was her and he did not look up.

"Do you want the light on."

"No."

She put it on. She stood there for a moment with her hand still on the switch, looking at the back of his head and the pad and the three sheets under the paperweight, and then she went away down the passage in her slippers, and he heard the tap in the kitchen, and then the kettle.

He finished the list. The last item on it he did not write down.

Then he went through to the bedroom and knelt at the cupboard, which took him a moment because he was sixty-one and had slept in a scrapped taxi on Wednesday, and he moved Miriam's shoes and the shoebox with the guarantees in it, and unlocked the safe that was bolted through the floor of the cupboard into the slab.

It held the title deed to the house. His father's watch, which did not go. Miriam's mother's ring in a bank envelope with her name on it in his own handwriting from 2039. A brown A5 folder.

And, in a soft cloth, the pistol he had been issued in 2016 and had carried for twelve years and had not handed in, because a police officer does not hand in the first firearm he is issued, and because handing it in requires an affidavit and a Saturday morning.

He looked at it for a while and did not take it out of the cloth. Somebody had oiled it in March, on a Sunday, at this cupboard, for no reason at all, and the somebody was him.

He opened the brown folder and took out the licence card and looked at it.

It was valid until August 2057.

He put the card back, and the folder back, and closed the safe and turned the key, and put the shoebox back and Miriam's shoes, and pushed the cupboard door to.

There was already one in the briefcase.

Part Three - The Proof

DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTIVE ENFORCEMENT
FINDING OF ANTICIPATED HOMICIDE
REGISTRY GP/2054/11-0883-C

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
s.14(2)(a) Preventive Enforcement
FILED 04 Nov 2054 14:02

SUBJECT
ANTICIPATED VICTIM
WINDOW

MOTAUNG, Josiah Thabo
GROBLER, Cornelius Johannes
06 days, expiring 24:00, 09 Nov 2054

FINDING: The subject will cause the death of the named person by discharge of a
firearm, within the window, in the presence of not fewer than four
persons. The act is assessed as deliberate, informed, and instrumentally
Intent formation: assessed complete, and assessed as reasoned.

READER'S NOTE: The subject will have read the two findings above to which
he acts. I have been asked what he will do. I have answered what he will
do not believe this is a prediction and I am asking, in writing, what he will

Thirty-Four Years

Day Five — Sunday 8 November 2054

They had searched the house on Thursday morning, four of them, under the first row, and they had done it properly. Motaung could tell from the study. Books put back in the order they came off the shelf rather than the order they had been in, which is what a careful team does when it has been told the subject is a member. The young one had apologised about the drawers. Miriam had given them coffee and then made all four of them sign the visitors' register she kept by the front door for the insurance, which she had made plumbers and meter readers sign for twenty years, and which none of them had felt able to refuse.

Row five had unlocked at six that morning. Ninety days of everything, every reader and camera and account and cell mast and till slip, run against the whole estate at once and not against a query, and it had not fired, because it required a Deputy Director's signature and the Deputy Director had put a written instruction on the operations desk on Thursday and had not moved off it since. Nobody had ever come out of the other side of row five. He had watched it done to a man in Benoni in 2041 and it had taken eleven hours and the man had been found in a room in Duduza that his own mother did not know about.

It was half past eight on Sunday night. The window shut at midnight tomorrow. He had been out for five days on a margin he had designed and a signature he had never once asked anybody for, and both of those things were going to run out inside the same day.

He came down from the study at twenty to nine because he had run out of things to look at.

The kitchen light was on. Miriam had the radio going, low, the Sunday phone-in, and there was half a pot of Saturday's samp on the plate warmer and two eggs on the counter next to it that she had taken out and not yet done anything with.

"Sit," she said. "You've been up there since four."

"I know what time it is."

"Then you know you haven't eaten since four either."

He sat.

On the radio a woman from Vereeniging was saying that her cousin's boy had been named in 2051 and that the family had known, everybody had known, you could see it in the child, and the Directorate had only put down on paper what the whole street could already see. The host was courteous with her. Then he went to a clip from the week's news, and it was Grobler, unhurried, in English, saying that the Federation's application did not ask the court to release a single person, it asked the court to look at the paper.

Miriam reached over and turned it off without any particular emphasis, the way you turn off a tap.

She put the samp in front of him and broke the two eggs into the pan and did not ask him anything. The house made its noises. The geyser, the gate motor settling, the neighbour's dog going down the fence line and back.

"Naidoo phoned the registry twice yesterday," she said, with her back to him. "Not about you. About the Wednesday distribution, which is now nine days out of date, because half the desk is doing your file instead of their work. She wanted to know whether the annual renewals still go on the twentieth."

"They do."

"That's what I said."

He ate. It was good and he could not taste it, which was a thing he had read about in subject-behaviour literature and had never had any reason to think about.

Then he put the briefcase on the chair beside him, opened it, and took out the docket and put it on the table.

It was the only thing in the briefcase apart from two findings and a pen. Old cardboard, the kind that had gone out of use before the Brownouts, furred at the corner where nineteen years of a drawer had worked at it, and the reference on the front in his own handwriting from when his handwriting had been better:

CAS 447/11/2027 — KATLEHONG.

Miriam looked at it for about as long as it takes to identify a thing you already know, and went on scraping the pan.

“SAPS 302,” she said. “Thirteenth of March 2035. You signed for it on a Tuesday and the Katlehong station commander wanted it back inside fourteen days, and it was still with us in April, and he wrote again.”

He did not say anything.

“I was in records that year. Everything the Directorate requisitioned came across my desk because there were six of us and I was one of them.” She put the pan in the water. “I cleared it, Josiah. I’ve known since 2035.”

Nineteen years.

He was aware of his hands first, flat on the table on either side of the docket, and of the fact that he was not surprised, which took him a moment to work out. He was not surprised because at some level below the one he did his arithmetic on he had assumed she knew, and had built nineteen years of not mentioning it on top of that assumption without ever inspecting the foundation.

“You never said.”

“And say what?” She sat down opposite him and dried her hands on the cloth and put the cloth on the table. “You’d have explained it to me. You explain very well. Then it would have been a thing we discussed.”

“Would that have been worse?”

“It would have been different,” Miriam said. “I don’t know about worse.”

They had been married thirty-four years. They had worked in the same building for nineteen of them, three floors apart, and in that time they had discussed the Act and both its amendments, the parking, the Estate's laundry tender, whether the annual report should carry photographs, Piet's knee, her mother, the bond, the roof, and the year the medical aid changed hands and everybody had to fill in the forms twice. There was no shortage of things to say. The house had never once been short of things to say.

He opened the docket.

He had not opened it in years. He had taken it out most mornings and looked at the front of it while the kettle boiled, which was as much as he had ever wanted, and he could not now remember when the last time had been that he had actually gone into it.

Three affidavits. The sister's, the neighbour's, and the one from the woman who ran the spaza on the corner, who had heard the man say what he was going to do and had signed a statement about it eleven days before he did it. Two of his own letters, the second and the fourth of the six, because those were the ones he had kept copies of. A photocopy of a protection order granted on the third of September 2027, served on the eighth, and filed. And a photograph.

A woman in a yellow top, standing in front of a Toyota with her arms folded, laughing at whoever was holding the camera.

He turned the photograph over and put it down on the table, face up, where it had light.

"She was twenty-nine," he said.

"I know."

"She had a job at a call centre in Alberton she was going to leave. She had a great deal to say about her sister's boyfriend and she said it to everybody. She was going to a christening that afternoon." He straightened the edge of the photograph with one finger, which was a thing he had not intended to do. "Beauty Ngobese."

Miriam did not move.

It was the first time the name had been said out loud in that house.

"The order was granted," he said. "It was granted, and it was served,

and it was filed, and it was in force on the fourteenth of November. I had the escalation. I had the dates. I had a man who had told three separate people what he was going to do and when, and one of them signed for it." He turned one of the letters round without reading it. "And I wrote to three magistrates twice each, and every one of them told me the truth, which was that no offence had been committed."

"The third one was kind about it," he said. "That's the part I kept. Not the refusals. He came round the counter and stood next to me instead of over me and he said he was sorry, and he meant it, and he was right, and I have never been able to get rid of him." He put his hand flat on the letters. "I can produce the other two in my sleep and I couldn't tell you what either of them looked like."

Miriam turned the letter with two fingers so that it faced her, and read a few lines of it upside down and then the right way up.

Somewhere in the second paragraph, in the flat typed English of a thirty-four-year-old detective who had been told twice already, it said: *I am not asking the Court to punish this man for something he has not done. I am asking the Court to make him sleep at another address.*

She read it and put it back on the pile and squared it up and said nothing about it at all.

"How many of the four hundred and nine," Motaung said, "had an order in the prior-record field?"

She did not ask him why he wanted to know. That was the thing about her that people who met her once thought was coldness. She had spent her working life being asked for numbers by men who did not want to explain themselves, and she had long ago stopped requiring it.

"Thirty-one."

"You've counted that."

"I counted it in 2049 and I've kept it up." She had her hands around the cloth. "Thirty-one findings where a Reader wrote that the subject would not do it, and there was a protection order of record against that subject, and the order was live."

"And they were all held."

"All thirty-one. Two of three, every time. The dissent went into the store and the warrant issued the same afternoon and every one of those thirty-one men is at Doringkop tonight, unless he's dead, and four of them are dead, because eleven thousand people is a big enough number to have funerals in it."

The fridge started up.

"And I can't tell you," Miriam said, "which of those thirty-one were him. Which of them were sitting in a room in Katlehong on a Sunday afternoon in front of somebody's sister. Nobody can tell you that. It isn't that we haven't looked; it's that there is nothing to look at. That's the whole of it and it doesn't get any better if you sit with it for eleven years."

He looked at the photograph.

"Give me the other one," he said.

"What other one."

"You didn't count thirty-one out of four hundred and nine and then stop counting."

Miriam almost smiled, and did not, and it was the closest either of them had come all evening to the thirty-four years.

"Two hundred and eleven of the four hundred and nine," she said, "had nothing in that field. Nothing at all. None of record."

He knew the phrase. He had written the guidance note on it in 2039 and it was still the guidance note, and it was on the page in his brief-case eleven centimetres from his hand, in the same typeface it had been in for nineteen years.

"Two hundred and eleven," he said.

"Two hundred and eleven. And the median household income decile of those two hundred and eleven is three, and of the whole distribution it's four, and I'm not going to tell you what that means because I don't know what it means. I know what I counted."

"Miriam."

"I counted them. I didn't decide anything about them." She put the cloth down. "If I'd started deciding I'd have stopped counting. That's not a principle, it's just what would have happened."

He sat with it.

Two homicides on Wednesday's board. Thirty-one in this province on a single Wednesday in 2029. Thirty-one men held on the word of two Readers over one, and four of them dead at Doringkop, and some unknowable number of them men who would have done it, and some unknowable number of them men who would not, and no procedure on the earth that could get between those two sentences, because the intervention destroyed the evidence, and everybody in the building knew it, and had known it since before there was a building.

There was a question under all of it that he had been carrying up and down those stairs since Thursday, and it had four words in it, and he got as far as opening his mouth. Then he did the arithmetic on what it would cost her to answer it, which was everything, and what it would be worth to him if she did, which was nothing, because a man cannot be told that, and he closed his mouth again. Thirty-four years, and the one question was still not going to be asked, and now he understood that it was never going to be, and that this was not a failure of nerve on anybody's part. It was simply not a question two people could survive in a kitchen.

"If you—" Miriam said.

She stopped.

He watched her stop. She put both hands flat on the table, the way a person does who has decided to hold still, and then she picked up his plate and the cloth and stood up, and the sentence went wherever those sentences go.

"Bring the glass," she said.

She washed and he dried, because that was the arrangement and had been since the Fochville flat, when there had been one draining board the size of a book and the only way two people could do it was in series.

She washed too hot. She had always washed too hot. He dried the

samp pot and then the plates and then the glass and put the plates in the cupboard on the left, and she watched him do it and did not say anything, and after a moment he took them out again and put them in the cupboard on the right, where they had lived since 2046.

“When did you move them?”

“When the shelf came down.”

“That was the other shelf.”

“It was that shelf,” Miriam said. “You put the bracket in.”

The tap was dripping. It had been dripping since August, one every four seconds, which he had timed once in September on his way out of the house and then stopped thinking about. He held his hand under it and looked at the way the drop came off the spout, off the back of the spout and not the front, which meant the spindle and not the aerator.

“Where’s the toolbox.”

“Josiah.”

“It’s the washer. It’s a two-minute job.”

“It’s been a two-minute job since August.”

“Then it’s overdue,” he said, and went out to the garage.

The mains tap was behind the meter box and it was stiff, and he opened it a quarter turn and shut it again to break it loose the way you do, and then off. The toolbox was where it had been for twenty years, on the shelf above the paint. There was a packet of washers in the lid, four of them on a card, bought at the hardware place on Codonia Avenue on a Saturday in September for eleven rand, and he had put them in the toolbox and not gone back into the house with them.

He lay on his back on the kitchen floor with his head in the cupboard under the sink and Miriam stood over him with the torch, the small one with the loose battery that had to be held at an angle, and she held it at the angle without being asked, because she had held it at that angle at the Fochville flat and in the first house in Norkem Park and in this one.

"Left," he said.

"It is left."

"More left."

She moved it. The light came onto the union nut and he got the shifter on it and it went, and the old washer came out flat and hard and grey like something dug up.

"That's perished," she said, from above him.

"It's fourteen years old."

"It's older than that."

He fitted the new one and did the nut up finger tight and then a quarter turn, because more than that is how you crack a spindle, and he had learned that from a man in Katlehong in 2024 whose name he could not now produce and whose face he could, and he sat up and his back told him he was sixty-one, and he went out and opened the mains.

The tap ran, and coughed once with the air in it, and ran clean, and stopped when he closed it. No drip.

They both stood and looked at the sink for a moment longer than the job required.

"Well," Miriam said.

He took the bin out at half past ten, because it was Sunday and the truck came on the Monday, and he wheeled it down the drive in the dark past the lemon tree and put it against the wall with the handle facing the street the way the municipality asked, and stood there for a second in his own driveway, a named man on the fifth day of a six-day window, putting out a bin.

Down the road somebody's gate motor ran. The dog came along the fence with him all the way back to the door, and lost interest, and went to lie down.

At twenty past eleven she was putting the pot away and he was standing in the middle of the kitchen with the dishtowel still in his hand, and he said:

"Is my grey jacket here?"

Miriam did not stop what she was doing and did not look round.

"Spare room cupboard. Second one in. The button's back on, I did it in March."

"Thank you."

That was all of it.

For five days she had taken apart everything he had put on that table. Give the sealed finding to a journalist: the paper's attorney phones the Directorate for comment at four in the afternoon and that call is the end of it, and she had the sequence off by heart because she had watched it happen in 2047 to a man in Klerksdorp. Take it to Cassim: Cassim has to sign row five eventually, and the day she files it the Estate starts to empty, and here is the number she had counted, and here it is again. Take it to the review committee in March: March. Every route he had put down she had picked up and turned over and handed back to him with the flaw uppermost, briskly, without any pleasure in it, for five days, because that was what she had instead of an opinion.

She did not say anything about the jacket.

She took the books down off the shelf above the bread bin, all eleven of them, two and three at a time, and stacked them in an empty box from the garage, and stood the box against the wall in the spare room.

She rinsed the cloth and wrung it out and hung it over the tap he had fixed, and squared the two chairs under the table, and said, "Lock the security gate, the bolt's sticking," and went up.

He locked the security gate. The bolt stuck and he lifted the gate a centimetre on its hinge with his knee and it went.

Then he stood in the kitchen with the light off for a while.

The docket was still on the table. He put the affidavits back in the order they had been in, the sister first, and the two letters, and the photocopy of the order that had been granted and served and filed. The photograph he held for a moment in the light coming in from the street, and then he put that back too, and folded the flap over, and put the docket in the briefcase on top of the two findings and did the

clasps. The left one had never caught the first time in nineteen years and did not catch now, and he did it again, and it caught.

Her car keys were on the hook by the door where they had been every night since 2046. White Corolla, and a plate that was on the estate and had been on the estate for eleven years, and would be read four or five times between Waverley and the N12, and after tomorrow the plate was not going to be a problem anybody had.

He went up at midnight.

The passage light was off and her door was closed and the spare room door was open. The cupboard was closed, and on the outside of it, with the hanger hooked over the top of the door where it would not crease against anything, was the grey jacket, brushed, with the button on.

He took it off the door and carried it into the other room and put it over the back of the chair by the window, where he could reach it at four.

Doringkop

Day Six — Monday 9 November 2054, 05:00

He took the Corolla because it was the car that was there.

It was eleven years old and the aircon had been broken since the winter of 2051, and neither of them had ever done anything about it, and so he drove out of Waverley at twenty to four with the window down and his elbow on the sill. The keys had been on the hook by the door where they had hung since 2046. Nobody had put them anywhere.

He went down the R25 through Bapsfontein because the R21 had roadworks at Olifantsfontein that had been there since August, and then east on the R50, and after Bronkhorstfontein there was nothing on the road but two cattle trucks and a bakkie with a broken tail light doing a hundred and ten in the middle of the lane.

Her plate had been on row four since Thursday morning. Row four was the plate estate on sixteen-hour history, which meant the system would eventually be able to say with complete accuracy that a white Corolla registered to M. Motaung of Waverley had passed the reader on the Delmas straight at 04:12 on Monday morning. It would say it in a batch, on the hour, to a desk. By then it would be true and it would be of no use to anybody, which was the whole of what row four was and the reason he had signed off on it in 2040 without argument. A sixteen-hour history is a net you drag behind the boat.

The mielies had come up to the height of a car door. Past Delmas the land opened out and went completely flat, potato lands on both sides with the irrigation booms parked at the ends of their runs, and the sky in the east had started to go the pale grey-green that comes

before it goes orange.

He passed the garage on the Delmas straight with the air pump and the low wall, and he did not slow down, and the shop was lit and there was a woman inside setting out the pies.

The Estate turn-off is not signposted from the main road. That had been a decision, taken in 2038 by a committee of four, and he had chaired it. The argument had been that a sign would draw the church groups and the film crews and the two-hour protest that comes with a photographer, and the counter-argument had been that a place the state runs should be findable. They had compromised: no board on the R50, a board at the turn-off itself, which was a compromise that gave one side everything it wanted and made the other side feel heard. He had learned that trick from a man in Public Works and had used it for sixteen years.

The board at the turn-off said DORINGKOP PREVENTIVE ESTATE and, under it, in smaller letters, VISITORS FOLLOW SIGNS TO GATE 2.

The perimeter road is gravel and it runs the full nine and a half kilometres, four metres outside the fence, with a mown servitude between the road and the fence and another four metres of mown ground on the inside. He turned onto it at the northwest corner and went round the top and down the eastern side at thirty, which is what the road takes.

The fence was 2.4 metres of galvanised palisade at seventy-five millimetre centres, and every vertical member terminated flat.

That was clause 12.4. He had written it himself, or rather he had written the sentence and the technical people had put a number on it: *No fence member shall terminate in a point or a spear head*. The manufacturer's standard product had a spear head. Cutting and capping eleven thousand-odd pales had come to three hundred and eighty thousand rand at 2037 prices and had taken an extra nine weeks, and it had gone to the audit committee twice, and the second time a man from Treasury had asked him, not unkindly, what the operational justification was. He had said there wasn't one.

No razor. No electric strand. No anti-climb, no rotating drum on the

top rail, no towers. The camera poles stood at two hundred metre intervals and they were angled down and inward at the ground, because the thing you are watching for on a perimeter at an open institution is not a man coming over the top, it is an old man face down in the grass at four in the morning with a hip.

The fence would take a reasonably fit person about ninety seconds. He had known that when he signed it.

In sixteen years there had been four.

He stopped the car on the verge on the eastern side where the ground rises about a metre and a half, which is the only rise anywhere near the place and the reason the water tower is where it is. From there you can see west across the whole of it. He got out and left the door open because the interior light in a 2043 Corolla goes off by itself after thirty seconds and he had never once in eleven years remembered that in advance.

He walked to the fence and put both hands on the rail.

It was cold, and the galvanising had gone chalky the way it does, and there was a smear of dried mud at knee height on the inside where the mowers turn.

Blocks A through D are single-storey and face inward onto courtyards, brick, with the long verandas he had insisted on because a veranda is where people sit and people who sit together do not do the other things. E and F are the two-storey ones and they went up in 2046 and they are ugly, and he had signed those too, because the alternative was a waiting list, and a waiting list at a preventive facility is a phrase he had refused to allow to exist.

Nothing was moving in the courtyards. There was a light over each entrance and a light at each end of each veranda and the lights were on a photocell, and the whole place at that hour looked exactly like a teacher training college.

Headlights came up the perimeter road from the south.

He leaned back into the car and closed the cubbyhole, and straightened, and stood where he was.

The bakkie was an Estate services double cab with a yellow strobe on the roll bar, not running, and it came up the gravel at the speed of a man who does this eight times a night, and it slowed and stopped four metres away and the window came down.

“Môre.”

“Môre.”

The driver got out. Twenty-five, twenty-six, in a navy uniform with a contractor’s shoulder flash — the perimeter is a tender, renewed every three years, and the company that holds it is a member in good standing of the Federation of Security Providers, and had been since before there was anything to guard out here. He had a torch he did not use and a paperback-sized notebook in his top pocket and he was already smiling before he was all the way out of the door.

“Direkteur.”

“Môre,” Motaung said.

“Ag nee, man.” The young man came round the front of the bakkie with his hand out. “Thabang Nkabinde. Ek het gedink ek droom. My ouma’s gaan nie glo nie.”

They shook hands. Nkabinde’s was warm and dry and he held on a half-second longer than a handshake needs.

“You’re on the induction,” he said. “The video. Where you say the thing about —” he moved his hand, not finding it — “the thing at the end. About the word.”

“Resident.”

“Ja. Resident, nie gevangene nie. Everybody makes fun of it in the training but everybody says it.” Nkabinde looked past him at the car on the verge, and looked back, and did not ask. “Direkteur, sorry, but are you here for the eight o’clock? Because they moved it to the admin block, the boardroom’s got the ceiling coming down.”

“I’m not here for the eight o’clock.”

“Okay.” He accepted that entirely. There was no reason not to. A Director is a man who arrives at odd hours for reasons that are above the pay grade of a man on a perimeter contract, and the Directorate’s own distribution list is an internal document that goes to Directorate

desks, and a contractor at Doringkop reads a post-order file and a duty roster and nothing else, ever, by design, because Motaung had specified in 2038 that the Estate must never be told why. Telling the Estate why was how you got a hierarchy of residents.

Nkabinde turned and put his back against the bonnet of the bakkie and looked through the fence with him, because that is what two men at a fence do.

"It's quiet," Motaung said.

"Mondays are quiet. Yesterday was visits, so everybody's —" he tipped his hand. "You know. Sunday night after visits is the noisy one. Block C had the music going till one. I don't go and say anything about the music, that's not my side of the fence, but I hear it."

"You're outside."

"I'm outside. Nine and a half kays, eight times, and then I do the north gate from four." He said it without any complaint in it at all. "I'm doing a diploma. Security management, through Unisa. Two years in, four to go, because I do one module at a time. The book is on the seat, you can look."

"What's the module."

"Risk. It's ninety per cent flowcharts." He laughed, once. "But it counts."

Out in the grass on the inside of the fence something moved and was gone, low, following the mown line.

Nkabinde took the notebook out of his top pocket without hurrying and clicked a pen and wrote in it. "Two tonight," he said. "That's a jackal. I count them. Nobody asked me to count them, I just started, and now I've got three years of it and last winter there were nine one night, which nobody believes. I'm going to put it in an email one day."

He put the notebook back.

"Direkteur, can I ask you something."

"You can ask."

"The nets." Nkabinde pointed with his chin, south, down the fence

line to where the ground flattened out again and the field was. "For the goals. The guys have asked twice, it went in on the — I don't know the form, the maintenance one, and it came back both times as unbudgeted. It's four nets. It's, what, six thousand rand? And they play every Saturday and every Saturday somebody must stand behind the goal and fetch the ball out of the mielies."

"Who signs the maintenance one."

"Estate manager, then it goes to Pretoria."

"It goes to facilities," Motaung said. "Facilities will have put it in the recreation line and the recreation line was consolidated into welfare in 2052 and welfare doesn't hold capital items. It needs to go in as consumables. Nets are consumables, they perish. Tell the manager to resubmit it as consumables and put a replacement cycle on it, three years, and it will go through."

Nkabinde was already getting his notebook out again. "Consumables," he said, writing. "Three years."

"I'll look at it," Motaung said.

"Baie dankie, Direkteur." He put the pen back in his pocket and the pocket had a flap and he closed the flap. "Nee, really. They're going to be very happy."

He got back into the bakkie, and then leaned out of the window before he pulled away, and pointed west with two fingers.

"You must move off the verge before that comes. The drainage on this side is nothing, the water comes off the road and it sits, and then you're standing there phoning somebody."

"I'll move."

"Sharp, Direkteur."

The bakkie went north up the gravel at thirty and the dust hung in the headlights behind it for a long time in the still air.

The field is at the southern end, between Block D and the wall of the school, and it is on the flat, and it is the only piece of ground on the property that has ever been properly levelled.

The lines were being marked.

There was a man out there in Estate overalls with a wheeled marker, walking the touchline with the slow splayed gait of somebody keeping a barrow straight, and behind him the lime came off the wheel in a line that was, from four hundred metres and rising ground, very nearly straight. He had a woollen hat on in November. He got to the corner and stopped and turned the marker on the spot and started up the goal line, and he did not look at the fence, or at the sky, or at anything except the ground half a metre in front of the wheel.

The goalposts had no nets.

Gate 2 is the visitors' gate and it is two hundred metres east of the field: a boom, a guardhouse, a prefabricated shade structure with a corrugated roof over a run of steel benches, a painted queue line on the concrete, and a noticeboard in a lockable glass case. The 2055 visiting dates were already up in the case, printed, laminated, both columns, January through December.

There is a bus. Two buses, on visiting Saturdays and visiting Sundays, one from the Springs rank and one that comes round through Tsakane and Duduza and Nigel, subsidised at eighty per cent, because in 2039 the numbers had come in for the first full year and the visit rate had been thirty-one per cent of eligible and somebody had gone and asked why instead of writing it up as a finding about family structure. It was a taxi fare. It was a return taxi fare from the East Rand and back, twice a month, on a Saturday, against a household income, and the whole of the difference between a man being visited and a man not being visited was one hundred and forty rand at 2039 prices. He had taken the bus subsidy to the committee himself and had used the phrase *the cheapest intervention available to this Directorate*, and it had gone through in eleven minutes with no discussion, which was the fastest anything he ever proposed had ever moved.

The visit rate went to sixty-four per cent and stayed there.

Yesterday's leavings were still on the ground because the cleaning crew comes at seven. Two orange traffic cones, one on its side. A cardboard box that had held cooldrink, flattened. Somebody's blue plastic hairclip in the gravel by the third bench. Under the bench at the far end, a child's shoe, one, the kind with a strap, and no child

had left the Estate yesterday without both shoes, so somebody had carried her to the car.

Past the gate the perimeter road runs another eight hundred metres and then there is a plastered wall about waist height around a rectangle of mown ground roughly the size of two tennis courts, with concrete markers in rows, and the mown ground continues past the last row.

THE NAMED

MOLOI, Kagiso Tebello	M 1
Learner, Gr 12, Tsakane. Deferred; not re-enrolled.	
NAMED	02 August 2052. Concurrence 2 of 3. Dissent recorded and sealed under s.14(6).
ANTICIPATED	Not disclosed to the subject.
RESIDENT	Doringkop Preventive Estate, Block F, from 05 Au
ORDER REVIEWED	2053 (renewed) · 2054 (renewed).
EDUCATION	Estate school. Grade 12 completed Nov 2053. Distinction: Mathematics.
EMPLOYMENT	Estate grounds, from Jan 2054. Satisfactory.
VISITS	Logged 3 of 57 eligible. Visitor of record: MOLOI, Ntombi Grace (grandmot Tsakane). No visits logged since 11 Jan 2054.

The library is in the old admin wing, the 2038 part, and it has the only decent windows on the property because in 1970-something the building had been a farm co-op office and somebody had faced it correctly.

One window was lit.

The library runs to eleven at night and opens at five, and it opens at five because in 2047 a resident committee had written a letter asking for it and the letter had come to his desk, and the costing had come back at one part-time post and the electricity, and he had signed it that afternoon, and he could remember signing it and could not remember reading the letter.

Somebody was at the second table from the window with a lamp on,

sitting up straight, and there was a book open flat and held that way, and a hand moving on paper next to it.

The Grade 12 examinations had started on the third. Mathematics Paper 2 was Monday.

He stood at the fence with his hands on the rail and watched the lit window for a while, and then the man with the marker finished the goal line and started across the top of the box, and he watched that.

Eleven thousand three hundred and forty-seven.

Divided by twenty-two, which is two full sides, is five hundred and fifteen point seven seven. Five hundred and fifteen matches, on that field, at the ninety minutes they actually play, which is eighty, is forty-one thousand two hundred minutes, which is twenty-eight days and change of continuous football, which is a number that means nothing at all and he ran it anyway and then ran it again because he had made an error in the second step the first time.

He stood at the fence.

A woman came out onto the veranda of Block B with a bucket and stood looking at nothing for a while and then went back in. A tap ran somewhere. The lamp in the library window did not move.

The sun came up behind him at eight minutes past five and put the shadow of the fence out across the mown servitude and into the grass on the inside, and the pales made a set of lines on the ground four metres long, and every one of them ended flat.

At twenty past five he turned round and looked west.

The cloud was there. It was still white on top and building, and the base of it had gone flat and blue-black and level as a shelf all the way along, twenty kilometres of it, and out under the base the rain was already down on the potato lands as a grey combing. The wind had not come yet. The smell came first, which is the order it comes in on the Highveld, and it came now, the cold mineral one off wet dust from a long way away.

An hour. Maybe fifty minutes. You could set a kettle by it and people out here did.

The man on the field did not look up. He walked out the top of the box and turned and came back down the other side of it, keeping the wheel on the line.

Motaung took his hands off the rail. The galvanising had left the chalk on his palms and he rubbed it off against each other, and then against his trousers, twice, the way you do when it does not come off.

He walked back to the car through the grass and got in. The interior light did not come on because the door had been open for eleven minutes.

He put his hands on the wheel and sat with them there for a while, looking at the fence at eye level from inside a car, which is not a view of anything.

Then he started it and turned it round on the verge in three movements, and went back up the perimeter road the way he had come, north, past the water tower and the northwest corner and out onto the tar.

At the turn-off he stopped at the board and indicated left, out of habit, on an empty road at half past five in the morning, and sat there with the indicator going while a truck came past.

The fuel gauge was on three quarters. Sandton was an hour and ten at that time on a Monday, an hour and twenty-five if the N12 was doing what it did after six.

He had three and a half hours.

He turned left.

Eleven Minutes

Day Six — Monday 9 November 2054, 09:00

The storm had come through at two in the morning and taken the heat out with it, and Sandton at nine o'clock was washed and cold and smelled of wet concrete. The gutters were still running. By two in the afternoon it would build again over the Magaliesberg and come east, and nobody inside an air-conditioned hall would know about it either way.

He came up out of the station on the escalator with about forty other people and turned right along the walkway, and the walkway was glass on both sides, and he walked at the speed of the man in front of him.

The shirt was new. He had bought it on Saturday at a Pep in Bramley for eighty rand and it still had the fold lines pressed into it in a grid across the chest, four squares wide, which was the kind of thing that made a man look like he had come from somewhere with a suitcase rather than from nowhere with nothing. The jacket was his own and was six days old on him. He had shaved in the bathrooms downstairs at twenty to nine, standing at the third basin, with the hand dryer going every eleven seconds behind him.

The briefcase went over his shoulder on the strap. Half the men on the walkway were carrying something similar.

Row five had unlocked at six on Sunday morning and it was now Monday and he was still walking, which told him one of two things and he could not tell which: that Ayesha Cassim had still not signed it, or that she had signed it at six this morning and it had been running for three hours. Three hours of a full behavioural retrospective is not nothing. It is not much either. It is enough time for a system to finish

saying where a man has been and to start saying where he will be, and then for that to sit in a queue behind an assault in Vosloorus.

He stopped thinking about it because there was nothing in it, and went in through the doors.

The banner in the foyer was two storeys of vinyl.

FEDERATION OF SECURITY PROVIDERS • 34th ANNUAL CONGRESS, and under it, in a lighter weight, **PROTECTING WHAT REMAINS**, which somebody had been paid for.

Registration was six trestle tables under a hanging sign, split alphabetically, and the queue at A–F was nine people long and the queue at S–Z was nobody. Behind the tables were the cardboard boxes the lanyards had come in and a woman in a Federation golf shirt with a clipboard and a cold, and a younger one beside her taking the walk-ups and the replacements and the people whose names had been spelled wrong.

At the end of the row, past the tables, there was a seventh table with no queue at all and a sheet of A4 taped to the front of it: **GOVERNMENT • MEDIA • SPONSORS**.

The lanyards on that table were in a shoebox, standing up in rows, and they were sorted by organisation and not by name.

The Directorate's two were where they had been every November for fourteen years. He knew this the way he knew a hundred other things about the machine he had built, which was to say he had signed a standing security note about it in 2041 and had read the same paragraph in the same wording every year since. Two liaison officers. They sit at the back and they drink the coffee.

The Directorate had never once, in fourteen years, sent the names in time.

So the Federation printed them the way they printed the media ones and the ones for the minister's office staff, which was blank in the name field, with the organisation underneath in eleven-point:

DIRECTORATE OF PREVENTIVE ENFORCEMENT LIAISON

There were three in the box. Two for the officers and a spare, because the woman who ordered the printing ordered a spare of everything and had done since she started, and she was not wrong to, and nobody had ever told her to stop.

He took one and put the lanyard over his head, and the girl on the table said “Môre” without looking up from a delegate list she was highlighting, and he said “Môre” back.

The list was a list. It had two next to the Directorate and there would be two, and at four o'clock this afternoon somebody would count the tags back into the box and reconcile the number, and the number would reconcile.

Past registration was the arch, and past the arch a folding table with a laminated sign, **FIREARMS TO BE BOOKED IN AT THIS POINT**, and under the sign a ledger, and under the ledger the Federation's negotiated exemption from the venue's house rule, printed out and slid into a plastic sleeve, because there had been an argument about it in 2049 and the industry had won it. The exemption covered licensed delegates. Four hundred people from the private security industry of the Republic of South Africa were licensed delegates.

The arch beeped for the man in front of him and beeped for him and beeped for the two men behind, and the steward beside it, a big man with a Federation lanyard and a paperback folded into his back pocket, did not look up, because he had switched off looking up somewhere around half past eight.

Motaung walked into the exhibition hall with four hundred armed men and a cup of coffee.

There were thirty-one stands and a curtained wall.

He noticed the curtain first, because it was badly hung and there was carpet visible under it, and because a room that has been curtained down to two thirds was booked in a year when it was full. He had seen the Federation's own membership numbers in a portfolio committee pack in 2051. Two hundred and forty thousand guards in 2035. Thirty-one thousand now.

The stands sold what they had always sold. Access control. Bollards.

A company from Kempton Park with an armoured bakkie in the aisle and a rope around it. Uniforms, on two headless mannequins, one of them leaning. A firm doing guard-management software with a screen looping an animation of a man walking a perimeter. A stand with a bowl of Wilson's toffees on a stool that nobody was taking, and a woman standing behind it with her arms folded, waiting for the plenary to empty the aisle so she could sit down.

The coffee was at the far end on two urns, and the pastries had gone by ten past nine, which is when pastries go.

The two liaison officers were at the urn.

He knew the older one by her posture before he read the lanyard, because she stood the way a police officer stands in a room she is not policing, with her weight even and her back not quite to anything. Forty-odd. The younger one was a boy in a suit that had been bought for the funeral of somebody in his family, holding his cup in both hands.

"—no, but you have to park on level three, hey. Level two is for the exhibitors. I got clamped here in fifty-one."

"They clamp you?"

"They clamped me. And then you must go and find the man, and the man is at the loading bay, and the man is having his lunch."

Motaung stood a metre from them and filled a cup and put two sugars in it, and they went on talking about the parking and then about the gala dinner on Wednesday, which the younger one had heard was good and the older one said was fine if you got there early.

Neither of them looked at him.

It was not a failure. It was the correct behaviour of two junior members of staff at a coffee urn at a conference they attend once a year, standing next to a sixty-one-year-old man in a shirt with fold lines in it, with a blank lanyard, holding a cup. There is no procedure that catches that, and there is no procedure that should, and he had said something close to that in front of a committee in 2043 and been thanked for his candour.

He moved off down the aisle with his coffee.

A woman fell into step with him at the guard-management stand because they were both going the same way at the same speed.

"Are you also going in? I think they're going in."

"I think so."

She had a plastic bag of samples in one hand, reflective vests, folded flat, four of them, which she was carrying around a congress at which she was not exhibiting because she had brought them for somebody and the somebody had not arrived. Her badge said **E. MAHLABA • MAHLABA PROTECTION SERVICES • MIDDELBURG**, and she was in her fifties, and she had a plaster on the side of her thumb.

"Ninety guards in forty-eight," she said. "Now it's forty. And two of those are my son's friends and I don't need them." She said it without any self-pity at all, the way you state a debtors' age analysis. "So I come here and I sit in the front, because if this thing of theirs goes through, then maybe there's work again."

"You think it will?"

"They've been saying it for nine years." She shifted the bag to her other hand. "My sister's husband was named in forty-seven. In Emalahleni. He had already put her in Witbank hospital twice and the second time the doctor wrote it down wrong."

She looked at the doors, where the ushers had started opening the second and third leaves.

"She's at home this morning," she said. "She's fine. She's a terrible cook but she's fine."

Then she asked him whether he knew if the tender documents for the provincial schools contract were being handed out at the Federation's own stand or at the department's table, because somebody had told her both, and he said he didn't know, and she said that was this whole industry in one sentence, and they went in.

The plenary hall had carpet tiles in two greys laid in a chequer, and the seam on the second aisle had lifted and been taped down with silver tape in a strip about a metre long.

The chairs were set out in nine blocks. He counted a block on his way down — six across and ten deep — and multiplied and got five hundred and forty, and then he stood at the end of a row near the back on the right and did what he always did, which was to count the empties and subtract.

About four hundred.

The three crews were where crews are. The public broadcaster had two cameras, one on a riser at the back behind the last block and one on the floor at the front left with a sandbag on each leg. The rolling news channel had a single operator and a woman with a clipboard and a headset who was talking to somebody in a gallery in Randburg. The third was one man with a rig on a monopod and a battery pack on his belt, from an outfit that had four hundred thousand subscribers and no office, and he had taped his own cable to the carpet with his own tape, which was a different silver from the venue's.

The cabling came down the wall in a bundle and ran under the taped seam.

Motaung sat down on the aisle in the second-last row.

The hall filled the way halls fill, from the back forward, which is the opposite of the way the seating is planned and has been since seating was invented. Men came in with the free notepad and the free pen and the Federation's tote bag and put them on the seat next to them to hold it for somebody who was still at the coffee. Two rows in front, a man took a call and had the whole of it at normal volume, about a shift roster at a mine gate outside Carletonville and a man called Freddie who had not pitched, and finished it by saying he would phone back when they came out, which he would not.

Somebody's chair had a broken bracket and made a noise every time he leaned back, and he leaned back four times, and then stopped.

The air conditioning came on hard at nine-twelve and a woman two seats along put her cardigan across her shoulders without breaking off what she was saying.

Four hundred people in a room at half past nine on a Monday with their programmes rolled up in their hands. The whole business of the country was in the building for two days and it looked like every other

Congress in every other hall: the lanyards, the tote bags, the queue at the bathroom, a man asleep.

At the front, a technician in a black shirt was on his knees at the lectern with the gooseneck microphone bent right over and his ear against it, and a second man at the desk at the back said something, and the room filled with a rising whine that went up until people put their hands over their ears, and stopped.

Somebody near the front clapped, twice, ironically.

That was nine-fourteen.

At nine-nineteen the session chair came up the steps and tried the microphone and it worked, and she started, and it stopped working four words in, and she stood there smiling with her programme in her hand while the technician came back up the steps.

At nine twenty-three she began again on a handheld that popped on every plosive.

She did the housekeeping. The fire exits, which she indicated with her whole arm, twice, left and right. The app, which she said was working now. The bathrooms past the escalators. The gala dinner on Wednesday, tickets at registration until noon tomorrow. The feedback form, which she asked them please to actually complete this year, and got a laugh.

“—and just before we start, from the office: four hundred and twelve delegates registered this year, which is up on last year, so somebody’s doing something right.”

There was applause. It was thin, but it was warm, because they were an industry and it had been a bad decade and four hundred and twelve was up on last year.

Motaung had been out by twelve, and noticed it, and was mildly irritated by it, the way he was irritated by any estimate of his that came in outside five per cent.

The woman with the headset by the front left camera lifted two fingers to the operator and said something into the boom of her mic, and Motaung, four rows behind her and one aisle over, heard the end of it.

“—no, they’ve eaten the whole thing. He’s got eleven minutes and we hold the window to nine forty-five.”

The programme on the seat beside him had it printed:

09:15 – 09:26 · Opening address · C.J. Grobler, Chairman.

At nine twenty-eight, Sergeant Portia Xaba came in at the back with her cup and stood against the wall where she had stood at four of these, and swept the room once out of habit, and her eyes went past him and came back.

He watched her do it. He watched the whole thing happen in her face in about a second and a half: the recognition, then the immediate correction, because the Director of Preventive Enforcement is not sitting in the second-last row of a Federation congress in a shirt with fold lines in it, and then the second look, which settled it.

She came down two steps of the aisle and stopped.

“Director.”

“Sergeant.”

She had a cup in one hand and a programme in the other and she was forty-one years old and there was no module for this. She was internal-security-cleared to be in this room, and she had been briefed on Thursday morning like everyone else, and the briefing had said what briefings say.

“Sir, I have to—”

“I know.”

She stood there for another second, and then she did the correct thing, which was to go back up the aisle and out through the doors into the foyer to make the call from somewhere she could hear, and the doors sighed shut behind her on their dampers.

The call would go to the operations desk. The operations desk would take it, and log it, and put it in the queue, and somebody would read it twice, and then somebody would look up.

He had built the desk. He had signed the establishment for it in 2037 and had fought for four more posts on it in 2044 and lost, and it ran

seven people on a Monday morning covering a province of sixteen million, and it was, by every international measure anybody had ever run against it, extremely good.

The lights in the hall came down a stop.

Grobler came on from the left without being introduced, because he had been introduced eleven minutes ago and the microphone had eaten it.

He was in a grey suit and no tie and he did not go to the lectern. He took the handheld off the stand at the side and came out in front of it, and he had a document folder under his left arm, dark blue, the kind with the elastic corners.

“Goeiemôre.”

The room said good morning back, unevenly, the way rooms do.

“Ek gaan eers vir julle sê wat aangaan met die mikrofoon.” He held it up. “Hierdie een werk. Die ander een werk nie. Ons het vir hierdie saal betaal vir twee dae, so ek dink ons kan volgende jaar vra vir ’n mikrofoon wat werk, of anders praat ek harder, en niemand wil dit hê nie.”

They laughed. It was an old man’s joke and it was not much of one and they laughed anyway, because he had been the chairman for eleven years and because he had done what a room needs doing at half past nine on a Monday, which is to be told that somebody knows the microphone is bad.

“Ek gaan die res in Engels doen,” he said, “want daar’s drie kameras hier, en ek wil hê dit moet reg opgeteken word.”

He put the folder on the corner of the lectern.

The rest was business, and he did it unhurried, in the flat courteous English of a man who has chaired things. The benevolent fund, which had paid out one hundred and ninety-one times in the year and was short. The training levy. The two members who had died: Solly Mabaso, forty-four, who went down of a heart attack at a boom gate in Boksburg at three in the morning and was found by the relief; and Charmaine Nel, thirty- six, on the N12 near Springs, in the rain,

in a company vehicle with bad tyres, which Grobler said out loud, because, he said, if he did not say it here he would have to say it in a coroner's court eventually and he would rather say it here.

The room stood up for a moment and sat down.

Then he said, "The application."

He let that settle. He was not a man in a hurry and he did not raise his voice, and the room went quiet in stages, from the front.

"You've all read the summary. Some of you have read the affidavit, and I'm sorry for you." A ripple. "Section fourteen sub six of the Preventive Enforcement Act. Where the Readers do not agree, the finding of the one who disagreed is sealed. It is kept. It is not destroyed. It is simply never shown to the person it is about, or to that person's lawyer, or to the court that renews the order, and it has been that way for nineteen years."

He looked at the folder on the lectern.

"Our founding affidavit says that provision is unconstitutional. The State's answering affidavit says the provision is necessary and that we have produced no evidence of any actual prejudice to any actual person, because" — and here he did smile, faintly, at his shoes — "because we can't see the documents. And they're right. That is a very good answer. It has worked for nineteen years."

He picked the folder up.

"We said we would amplify."

Nobody in the hall moved. Behind the last block the riser creaked as the broadcast operator came off the eyepiece and back onto it.

"What is in my hand is a finding of anticipated homicide made by a Reader of the Directorate of Preventive Enforcement at nine forty in the morning on the fourth of November, this year, five days ago, and sealed at twelve o'clock the same day under section fourteen sub six. I am not entitled to have it. Nobody in this room is entitled to have it. The person it concerns is not entitled to have it." He turned it over in his hands once. "I am going to read it to you, and then I am going to answer for it, and I have been advised by senior counsel this morning that I will."

The six sheets in the folder were a print of a photograph taken at a registry terminal in Struben Street at twenty past six on Sunday morning by W/O D. Lombard, whose section audits the sealed store and therefore has a line into it.

He took a pair of reading glasses out of his top pocket and put them on, and shook the folder open one- handed.

The woman with the headset by the front camera said something short into the boom.

“Directorate of Preventive Enforcement,” Grobler read, into a bad microphone, in a hall with a taped seam in the carpet. “Republic of South Africa. Finding of anticipated homicide, section fourteen sub two (a), Preventive Enforcement Act. Registry G-P, two zero five four, eleven, oh eight eight three — B.”

The Proof

Day Six — Monday 9 November 2054, 09:40

Grobler put his reading glasses on and the hall went quiet the way a hall does when four hundred people stop talking separately, at their own speeds, over about six seconds.

The carpet tiles were laid in two greys in a chequer, and the last course before the platform had been cut short by somebody in a hurry, so there was a strip of grey along the front of the stage that did not match. The urns were at the back on a skirted trestle. Three of them, and a fourth for hot water, and the smell of coffee that had been hot since seven. Behind the platform a banner nine metres wide: FEDERATION OF SECURITY PROVIDERS, 34TH ANNUAL CONGRESS, and beneath that, in a smaller weight, the year's theme, which was A PROFESSION UNDER LAW.

On the platform behind Grobler there were four chairs and three men in them, and the fourth chair had a programme card taped to it for somebody who had not come. The card in Motaung's own pocket said 09:15 – 09:26, OPENING ADDRESS · C.J. GROBLER, CHAIRMAN, and then a bracket, and inside the bracket the number of minutes the chairman had given himself, and the number was eleven.

Motaung sat on the aisle in the second-last row with a cup of coffee he had not drunk.

The two Directorate liaison officers were at the back on the left, by the urns, where the liaison officers stand at every congress and every conference and every portfolio-committee open day, because that is where the coffee is and because it is the one place in a hall from which you can see the doors. The young one had a muffin on a servi-

ette balanced on top of his cup. Neither of them was watching the platform. They had been sent to observe an industry association and they were observing it.

Grobler did not use the lectern microphone properly. He stood too far back from it, the way men of his generation do, and a sound operator somewhere brought him up, and for the first sentence he was too loud and then he was correct.

"I am going to read this in English," he said. "Ek gaan dit in Engels lees, want ek wil hê dit moet genotuleer word."

Some laughter. Not much. He waited it out with his hand flat on the page.

Motaung stood up while the laughter was still going and went down the aisle with the cup held away from his jacket. A man on the end of a row moved his knees for him without looking up from his programme. He came out of the aisle at the front of the block and stopped at the wall at the end of row H, and stood there.

He was not performing. Motaung had expected performance, and had spent part of Saturday preparing for it, and there was none. Grobler read the way a man reads a serial number to a clerk on the phone: slowly, without colour, repeating the parts that mattered.

"Registry number GP, two thousand and fifty-four, eleven, oh-eight-eight-three, B. GP/2054/11-0883-B. Filed on the fourth of November this year, at twenty minutes to ten in the morning, by Reader B."

The tripod camera was centre, on the riser at the back, with a man behind it who had not moved since the session opened. The roaming operator was in the aisle six rows down from Motaung, on one knee, with his cable looped once around his forearm so nobody would tread on it. The third crew was on the platform steps, shooting up, which is a bad angle and the only one they had been given.

"Across the top of this page there is a line. I am going to read the line. It says: Sealed. Section fourteen, subsection six. Not for disclosure."

The noise the room made was not loud. It was four hundred professionals shifting in chairs at once, which is a sound like a train a long way off.

There was a woman two rows in front of Motaung with her lanyard

turned the wrong way round so the card hung backwards, and she had a Federation folder open on her knees and a pen, and she had stopped writing.

“Subject,” Grobler read. “Motaung, comma, Josiah Thabo.”

The train went past again, closer.

A man at the end of row F turned all the way round in his seat and looked at the back of the hall, at the urns, at the doors, at nothing, the way people do when a name is said and they want to see it land on somebody. His eyes went over Motaung and did not stop. Motaung was standing against a wall in a grey suit with a blank lanyard, holding a cup, and he was sixty-one years old, and there was nothing about him that a room full of security men would look at twice.

“Anticipated victim. Grobler, comma, Cornelius Johannes.”

Now it was loud. Somebody at the back said *jissie* out loud and did not mean to. The floor manager for the centre crew put two fingers up to the operator on the riser: *stay*. Grobler let it run. He turned the page over on the lectern and squared it with the flat of his hand and looked out over the top of his glasses and waited, and the hall came down again on its own, because they were people who had been trained to be quiet when a principal is speaking.

“Window. Six days, expiring midnight, the ninth of November.” He looked at his watch, which was on the inside of his wrist. “That is tonight.”

He had not raised his voice once. He had been a general and had briefed rooms bigger than this one in worse years, and he read a state document to four hundred people the way you read a state document, and the effect of it was that every person in the hall was leaning very slightly forward, including the three men in the chairs behind him, who had known what was in his hand since Thursday and had signed a resolution about it.

There was a court application in Sandton that had a case number and a set-down date, and it had been assembled over eleven years by people who were correct, and it was thin in exactly one place, and the Federation had told the court in writing that it would amplify.

The strip of mismatched carpet. The lectern was set two metres

stage left of centre. Behind it the banner and behind the banner a black drape and behind the drape the back wall of the hall and the loading corridor, which was concrete, and nobody in it, because the caterers had been told to hold service until ten.

"Finding," Grobler said.

Motaung bent his knees and put the cup down on the carpet against the skirting board.

Two steps into the aisle to clear the woman with the lanyard turned backwards.

The operator on one knee, six rows down, was inside the line. Motaung waited. Three-quarters of a second, maybe one. The man leaned in and shifted left off his knee to get the platform steps into frame and took his own head out of it.

The pistol was in his right jacket pocket because a shoulder holster prints and a hip holster does not come out clean sitting down. Lombard had put it down on the floor of the parkade on Sunday and stepped away from it and driven down the ramp, and it was the Vektor the Federation had supplied for the job, clean, with the serial number still on it. His own firearm was in a drawer in Struben Street where he had locked it on Wednesday.

He had signed the register at the door too, at a trestle table with two clerks and a hardcover book, at five past nine, in his own handwriting. A hundred and thirty of the four hundred and twelve were carrying, under the Federation's licensed-delegate exemption. The clerk had read the column, not the name.

Out. Both hands. The left one came up under the right the way it does after thirty-five years, without being asked.

Nine metres. Slightly downhill, no. Uphill. The platform was nine hundred high and the lectern face was oak-veneer chipboard and behind the man there was drape and behind the drape there was a wall.

He had last shot at Silverton in 2046 and had scored badly and had made a joke about it.

His hands were steady. His hands had been steady since Delmas. It was his mouth that was dry and there was nothing in his mouth to do anything about.

Front sight.

The subject will —

Two.

The second one before the first had finished going through the PA and coming back, so the hall got them both twice, out of phase, once from the room and once from the speakers, and the speakers were louder.

Grobler went down behind the lectern and the lectern stayed up.

The reading glasses came off the platform and landed on the mismatched carpet by the steps, folded.

Motaung opened his hand.

The pistol went onto the carpet at his feet and he went down after it, both knees, then his hands flat, and then his hands behind his head with his fingers laced, and he put his forehead against the carpet tile and kept it there, because that is what the module says a compliant subject looks like and because it is the only posture that does not get a man shot in a room where a hundred and thirty people are armed.

Nobody shot him.

It took four seconds for anybody in the hall to make a sound, and the sound was a chair going over.

Then the room took hold.

A woman in a Federation blazer was on the platform before the echo was finished, on her knees, with her jacket off and folded and both hands on it, and she was counting out loud, and the counting was for herself. A second man got up there and took over the pressure on the folded jacket so that she could get a hand free for the radio, and neither of them said anything to the other about the changeover.

"Control, control, Delta One. Shots fired, main hall. One down on the platform, one down. One suspect detained, weapon secured. Delta One is stable. I need the ambulance at loading, not at the front, at loading."

Flat voice. A man who had done the course, and had run the course, and had probably written a version of the course.

At the back the two double doors were already standing open because a marshal had opened them at 09:38 for the caterers, and about sixty people went out through them fast and badly, and about three hundred and forty did not, because the marshals were shouting the thing marshals shout.

"Sit. Almal sit. Sit down please. Sit down. Nobody in the aisle. Sit down."

And they sat down. That was the part. Four hundred delegates at a congress of the private security industry sat down in their chairs in an orderly fashion and put their hands on their knees, and a man in row D got his phone out and started filming and the woman next to him took his wrist and put it down for him without looking at him.

Two men arrived on Motaung at the same time from opposite sides and got it right. One knee across the shoulder blades, the arms out and back one at a time, a check of the waistband, the ankles, the small of the back. A third man stood off at two metres with his hands open where they could be seen, which is what you do when you are the third man.

"Sir. Is there anything on you that is going to hurt me?"

"No."

"Anything sharp, anything in the pockets?"

"No."

Cable ties, because that was what the man had. He put them on well and checked the gap with his little finger.

The lectern microphone was still open and it was taking everything that happened within two metres of it and giving it to the room at a hundred and ten decibels, and it did that for about forty seconds before somebody in the control box found the right fader, and the hall

got one short blade of feedback on the way down and then the sound of itself, unamplified, which was smaller than anyone expected.

A delegate in row C had been a medic in the Brownouts and got as far as the platform steps and was told, courteously, by the woman in the blazer, that she had it, and he stood at the bottom of the steps for a while with his hands half up, and then went back to his seat and sat down and put his hands on his knees. Somebody two seats along from him was being sick into a bin liner that a marshal had produced from somewhere, quietly, and the marshal stood in front of him with his back turned to give him the room.

The pistol had a delegate's conference bag on top of it. Someone had put the bag over the weapon rather than touch it, and then had stood over the bag, and was still standing over it with his arms folded and his face doing nothing, a big man in his fifties, holding a position over a bag on the floor because he had decided that was his job now and nobody had a better idea.

At the lectern the pages had gone off onto the platform in the general movement. Six sheets, and the Federation's junior counsel came up the steps sideways to keep out of the way of the two working on Grobler, and knelt, and gathered them, and squared them on her knee, and turned them face down. She was called Yolisa Booi and she was thirty-three and she had been up until two in the morning on the schedule of annexures. She put the six sheets into a folder and closed the folder and held it against her chest with both arms and stood at the edge of the platform looking down at what the two of them were doing, and she did not read a word of it, then or in the next hour, because there was a man on the floor.

The centre crew never stopped. The floor manager said, "We're live, we're still live, stay wide," in the voice of a person telling somebody the time, and the operator on the riser stayed wide.

The woman two rows in front of Motaung, the one with her lanyard on backwards, sat down again when the marshals said to, and put her folder back on her knees, and said, to nobody, "Hulle het geweet. They knew."

Nobody answered her.

The house lights came up to full, which somebody had thought to do,

and under full light the hall looked like what it was: a rented room with a bad microphone and a chequered carpet, four hundred people sitting down, coffee going cold in three hundred and eighty cups, and a man's shoes visible past the end of the lectern.

Motaung lay on the carpet tile with his cheek against it and the tile was cool and smelled of new adhesive. Under the seats, along the floor, at eye level: a dropped pen, a conference bag, a sachet of sugar, and a phone face up under a chair in row G with its screen still on, filming the ceiling.

The liaison officers came down the aisle at a walk, not a run, because two people running is how a room that has just sat down stands up again.

Constable Tumi Sedibe, twenty-four, four months on liaison, was carrying a polystyrene cup in his left hand the whole way down the aisle and did not seem to know it. W/O Elmarie Prinsloo, who had done the congress five years running and knew where the toilets were and which urn was decaf, got to Motaung first, and crouched, and looked at his face for slightly too long.

"Director," she said.

Then she stood up and stepped back and got on her radio and reported it correctly, using his rank, his full name, and the registry number of the warrant outstanding against him, which she had to look up on her phone and which took her nine seconds, and during those nine seconds nobody said anything at all.

Sedibe put his coffee down on the arm of a chair. The serviette with the muffin on it he kept, folded over in his left hand, all the way through the next twenty minutes.

At the back, by the riser, a producer was standing on a chair with a phone against her ear and her other hand over her other ear, saying, "It's out. It went out live, it's already out, we're not pulling anything, tell him it's out," and then she got down off the chair and started writing on the back of a running order.

They did not take the cable ties off. There was a discussion, brief and professional, about jurisdiction, which the man who had put them

on won, because he was the one who had put them on and the hall was private property and the Directorate liaison officers were, on the paperwork, guests.

The marshals got the count going, because a count is what you do. The registration desk had scanned four hundred and twelve delegates through the doors between eight and nine, plus fourteen crew, plus the platform party, and the head marshal wrote 412 in a Federation notebook and underlined it and went to find out how many had gone out the back.

The ambulance came in at loading, as asked. The paramedics went up the platform steps at 09:51 and the woman in the Federation blazer moved out of the way to a place where she could still see, and stood with her arms straight down at her sides, and someone brought her jacket back to her, and she held it without putting it on.

They took him out through the service door at the side of the platform because the front of the hall was where the cameras were, and the service door was where they were going to bring the trolley.

Concrete corridor, painted grey to waist height and cream above it, and a floor drain, and a long steel rack of folded banqueting chairs. The corridor was warm. It had rained at six and the loading yard beyond the roller door was steaming.

A catering trolley stood against the wall by the fire door, three tiers, everything under clingfilm. Muffins on the top tier, the small ones. Beside it a woman in a hairnet and a black apron with her hands down in front of her, waiting, because she had heard the noise and had been told nothing and had a service to put out at ten.

The two men walked Motaung past her, one on each arm, and she pressed herself and her trolley back against the grey paint to give them room, and looked at the floor while they went by, and then at his face when he had gone past, and then at the floor again.

Nobody told her anything.

At three minutes past ten she peeled the clingfilm off the top tier, folded it into a ball, put it in her apron pocket, and pushed the trolley out into the corridor towards the hall.

By the Book

Day Six — Monday 9 November 2054

They put paper bags over his hands and taped them at the wrist, and he held his arms out in front of him while they did it, because that made it easier for the man doing the taping.

The room was on the second floor of the Sandton station and had a table with a cigarette burn in it from before the smoking regulations, two chairs, a window of glass brick that let in light from a shaft and no view at all, and a laminated notice about a wellness line for members under stress. There was a mark on the wall at head height where a hundred people had leaned back.

His ears were still wrong. That had started in the hall and had not stopped, a high flat tone under everything, and when the technician spoke he had to watch the man's mouth.

"Left first, sir."

"Right," Motaung said. "Firing hand first, then the support hand, then the web. If you do the left first you carry it across."

The technician stopped. He was about thirty, with a plaster on his forearm and a lanyard from a course he had done in Pretoria, and he looked at the swab in his glove and then did the right hand first.

"Thank you, sir," he said.

Nobody asked him anything. That was the first thing he noticed with the working part of himself, some distance behind his eyes: a captain came in at eleven, introduced himself as Mabaso, said the docket was his, and asked whether Motaung wished to make a statement. Motaung said he did not. Mabaso wrote one line, and thanked him,

and left, and did not come back, and nobody else came in with a folder and a chair turned around. In a shooting with three broadcast crews on it there should have been four people in that room by noon, competing.

At some point they took the bags off his hands and gave him tea in a mug with a cracked handle, and a woman constable stood in the doorway while he drank it because someone had to.

The station commander came up at half past twelve, a colonel with reading glasses pushed onto his head, and stood in the doorway and said that if the Director wanted to wait somewhere else there was an office available upstairs, and Motaung thanked him and said the room was fine, and the colonel said, “Ja, no, that’s — ja,” and went away and did not offer again, and afterwards a sergeant came and stood outside the door in a way that had not been happening before.

He was thirsty in a manner he did not remember being thirsty. His shirt had gone through to the vest under the arms and dried again. Twice in the afternoon his right hand closed on nothing, a small tightening at the base of the thumb, and both times he watched it happen and made no sense of it and let it go.

In the passage a radio was on, tuned to a talk station, and he could hear it in pieces between the tone in his ears.

—no, but you listen to me, they knew. That’s my point. They knew in advance and they let it happen, they always know—

—we don’t actually know what the Directorate knew, we haven’t—

—two thousand and twenty-nine, my brother-in-law, thirty-one people in one day in this province, one day, and now the man is on the floor of a convention centre and everybody wants to cry about it—

Then the news at the top of the hour, and the provincial figure for the day so far, which was one. He worked out that it was the first time in nineteen years that a number he was inside had been read out on the radio, and then stopped working things out for a while and sat with his hands on the table and looked at the burn mark.

Advocate Rethabile Sono arrived at twenty to four with a folder under a bulldog clip and an apology about the M1.

He was a Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions for South Gauteng, and he had a shaving cut and a supermarket sandwich in a plastic wedge which he put on the table and did not open, and he was about fifty and entirely unremarkable, and he had not met Motaung before and said so.

"I'm going to read you the decision, and then I'll leave you a copy," he said, and sat down and read it.

The State declined to prosecute. Not on the merits. The memorandum used the phrase *not at this time* and the phrase *provisionally withdrawn*, and set out that the matter could be re-enrolled at any stage, and then set out why it would not be, in four numbered paragraphs that took Sono under three minutes to read aloud in the voice of a man who reads things aloud all day.

A prosecution would put the Directorate's record of findings before a criminal court. A defence would be entitled to the whole record. A defence would raise section fourteen sub six, and would raise it in the same term as the Federation's constitutional application, before a full bench that had already reserved three weeks. The Republic did not intend to litigate the sealing regime in a criminal court with the man who had built it standing in the dock.

"And four," Sono said. "There is an anticipatory warrant extant against you, issued on the fourth of this month, which has not been executed. The instruction is being prepared now. It'll be executed today." He turned the page over and squared the folder. "The window expires at midnight. So it'll be tonight."

"Who signs the execution instruction?"

"The Acting Director."

Motaung sat with that. It occurred to him that Cassim would have taken the acting appointment at about half past ten this morning, and that she would have had to be told what she was acting in, and by whom, and that she would have gone into her own office and closed her door and read the instruction properly before signing it, because she read everything properly.

"There's a custody order as well," Sono said. "That goes to the designated magistrate this evening."

"Who's designated this month?"

"Pillay."

"Yes," Motaung said.

Sono put the memorandum square on top of the folder and did not get up yet.

"Has the family been notified," Motaung said.

"They were notified at the venue. The daughter was there." Sono said it the way he had said the rest of it, which was the only way Motaung could have taken it. "She's a doctor in Centurion. She asked to see him and they let her, which they don't normally do at a scene, but the venue was cleared by then and it was a manager's decision. The son is in Perth. He lands Wednesday."

"Where is he going to be buried?"

"I wouldn't know."

There was a magazine photograph in the security note, four paragraphs, unread since June: a heavy man in a golf shirt at a prize-giving, holding a trophy at the wrong angle for the camera, the way men hold trophies they have already put down once.

"The congress adjourned at ten past ten," Sono said. "Their attorneys were on the phone to my office by two about the constitutional application. It proceeds. They were at pains to say that it proceeds."

"It's a good application."

"So I gather," Sono said. "It's not mine."

He took a yellow slip off the inside of the folder cover and looked at it with the expression of a man discharging somebody else's errand.

"I've got a question from your operations desk. They asked me to put it to you because — well, they asked me to put it to you." He read it. "The annual return. There's no classification for this. They want to know where it goes."

"Table four, line nine."

"Line nine."

“*Other*. There’s a note field, three hundred characters. Whoever completes it should use the note field and not the free text at the end of the section, because the free text doesn’t carry through to the consolidated return and then Treasury asks for it in February.” He heard his own voice doing it, level, useful. “Tell van Wyk it’s line nine and tell him I said the note field.”

Sono wrote *line 9 / note field* on the yellow slip, in the manner of a man who has no idea what he is writing and will hand it over correctly, and put it back inside the cover.

“They’ll bring you something to eat,” he said, standing. “I’m sorry — that’s not my department, but they will.”

The order came back at ten past eight in the evening. A constable brought the pages through and put them on the table in front of him because nobody had told her not to, and went out again. Rina Pillay had signed at 19:35. There was a coffee ring on the second page, in the margin next to the annual review provision, and a query written above it in blue ballpoint asking whether the review date ran from the date of the finding or the date of the order, and a note in another hand that it ran from the date of the order, and then her signature, unhurried, with the loop under it.

November, then. Every year, in November.

At five to ten there was a knock at the door. Four knuckles, three times, at the volume you would use on a door that had someone’s mother behind it.

“Mr Motaung? Josiah Motaung?”

“Yes.”

“Sergeant Modise, Preventive Enforcement. This is Constable Steenkamp.”

He knew her. He had shaken her hand in a line of eleven people in a hall in Germiston in 2049, at the annual conduct commendations, which the Directorate gave for uptakes performed properly and which had been his idea. She had a firmer grip than most of the men. She had a plaster on her thumb and her boots were new and squeaked on the floor tiles, and she came in and stood at a distance of about a

metre and a half, which was in the manual, and Steenkamp came in behind her and stepped left out of the doorway with his hands where they could be seen.

"Cuffs," she said to the constable at the door, and the constable came in and took them off him, and Motaung rubbed his wrists once and put his hands down.

Modise took the card out of her breast pocket. It was laminated, because the Directorate had learned early that paper shakes.

She held it at chest height and read it the way it was written, which was slowly.

"Mr Motaung, in terms of section fourteen of the Preventive Enforcement Act, a finding has been made that you will cause the death of another person within the next six days. You have not committed an offence. You are not under arrest. No criminal record arises from this. You are being taken into preventive custody at Doringkop Preventive Estate, where you will be a resident and not a prisoner. You have twenty minutes to pack. You may make one telephone call now and further calls from the Estate this evening. You may take personal effects up to one bag. Do you understand what I have read to you?"

"Read it again," Motaung said.

She read it again, at the same pace.

"I understand," he said.

"The named person isn't disclosed to you, sir. That's for their protection and for yours." She turned the card over. "There's a duty advocate. The number's on the back, and you can call from the Estate any time between six and eight."

"Thank you."

She put the card back in her pocket and took the clipboard from Steenkamp and endorsed the execution instruction on the table, printing the time in the block: 21:58. Motaung read it upside down while she wrote, because that was what he did with paper.

It was one page. The allocation line at the foot of it had been generated by the rostering system and read MODISE R / STEENKAMP J, EAST RAND 2, which was whoever had been next on the board, and

above that, at the authorisation block, in the small careful signature of a woman who had been Acting Director for eleven hours, CASSIM, A.

He looked at it for about as long as it takes to read four words, and then looked away, and that was all there was to that.

"We'll take you past the house for the twenty minutes. That's Waverley?"

"Waverley."

"You can make your call now if you want to make it."

They had brought his phone up from the property store in a sealed bag and Steenkamp opened it and handed it to him, and Modise turned away and looked at the wall, because that was decency, and the wall had the wellness-line notice on it and a printed sheet about a fun run that had taken place in September.

Miriam answered on the second ring, which meant she had been sitting with it.

"It's me."

"Yes."

"They're bringing me past the house. Twenty minutes to pack. We'll be there before eleven."

There was a pause on the line that he could not read, and then she said, "I've got the blue bag out," and he understood that she had put it on the bed at some point in the afternoon, and had then gone on with the day around it for six hours.

"All right," he said.

"Josiah."

"Yes."

"Eat something," she said.

The passage light was on in Waverley and the security gate was open, which she never left open.

Modise stood in the passage and let him do it. That was the manual too. He went into the bedroom and put the blue bag on the bed, and Miriam stood in the doorway of the bathroom with her arms folded and did not help him, because helping him would have finished her.

He packed four shirts, none of them the ones he wore. He packed a phone charger. He packed the reading glasses from the kitchen drawer, which were not his good ones, and left the good ones on the bedside table eighteen centimetres from his hand. He packed a bar of soap in a soap dish, and no underwear, and then went back and packed underwear because he saw the soap dish and understood something about the last nineteen years that he was too tired to hold on to.

Miriam came past him once, put his blood pressure tablets in the side pocket, and went out again.

The docket was on the dining room table where it had been since Sunday night, in the old cardboard, CAS 447/11/2027 in his own handwriting from when his handwriting had been better. He put it in the bag flat, underneath the shirts, and zipped it.

At sixteen minutes Modise said, "Four minutes, sir," from the passage, and he said, "Ja," and stood in his own bedroom for a moment with his hand on the wardrobe door.

In the entrance hall Miriam put her hand on his arm above the elbow and held it there, and then took it away, and neither of them said anything at all, because there was a sergeant and a constable four metres away and thirty-four years is not something you do in front of people.

Steenkamp put his hand out for the bag at the door. Motaung gave it to him.

Across the road the outside light had come on at number 9, and Willem Prinsloo, who had lived there for twenty years and had twice asked Motaung to look at something on his rates account, was standing inside his own gate in a gown with his arms folded. He did not come out and he did not go in. The Corolla was in the street with its parking lights on. Modise waited until Motaung was in and shut the door for him, and the mesh was the ordinary mesh, and he had signed the procurement for that model of vehicle in 2044 on a seven-year

cycle that had run to ten.

They kept him overnight at Struben Street, because Doringkop does not process an intake before eight and the manual says a subject may be accommodated at a Directorate facility in the interim, and Struben Street was where the facility was.

He came in through the front, because that was where the vehicle bay was, and the lobby smelled of floor polish and of 1974, and Piet was on the night shift, which he had done every second week for as long as anyone could remember because the night shift paid a differential and his wife wanted a caravan.

Piet stood up when he saw them. He did not ask for the card, because there was no card any more.

“Nag, Direkteur,” he said.

“Nag, Piet.”

Behind him by the lifts was the poster with the two children on the swings.

The transit room was on the ground floor at the back and had a bed with a foam mattress, a chair, and a window with a fixed pane onto the parking.

Steenkamp did the property list at the desk outside it, out loud, writing as he went, because a resident may keep a bag and may not keep a phone or a wallet or a set of keys. One mobile telephone, black. One wallet, brown, containing four cards and one hundred and eighty rand. Three keys on a ring with a plastic tag from a car dealership in Menlyn that had closed. He put his watch on the desk with the rest of it and Steenkamp pushed it back across and said residents kept watches and rings, and he put it on again.

“Sign there, sir. And there. That copy’s yours.”

He lay on the bed in his clothes with the light on. Somewhere above him, six floors up, there was a kettle in an office that he was not supposed to have, and a cabinet with the Act in it and every amendment, and a bottom left drawer that was now empty.

He slept about two hours, which was more than he expected.

Modise collected him at twenty to five.

It had rained again some time before three and the tar was still dark in the shade of the bridges. The mielies along the N12 past Benoni were flattened in patches where the wind had got into them on Monday morning, and the sun came up over the East Rand flat and orange the way it does in November, so that even the reclamation works looked like something being offered.

He sat behind the mesh. Steenkamp drove. He had stopped smoking and was working through a roll of Halls, and at one point he put the radio on and then turned it off again after four seconds without being asked.

They stopped at the garage outside Delmas, because the intake would not open before eight and because it was policy to feed them.

Steenkamp bought three breakfast rolls and three coffees, and Motaung sat on the low wall by the air pump with the blue bag between his feet and ate his, all of it, in the cold, with his coat over his knees.

Modise stood a little way off with her coffee and watched the road.

At ten past seven she came over and took the paper and the cup out of his hands and put them in the bin, and said, "Sir," and he stood up and picked up the bag, and Steenkamp took it from him, and they got back into the car and drove the last twenty-two kilometres to the Estate with the windows down because the morning was already warming and Steenkamp's air conditioning had been booked in twice.

Resident

December 2054 – March 2055

The rooms have no locks on them.

That is the first thing new residents ask about, in the induction, every time, in the room off the admin block with the plastic chairs; and the answer is that the block doors lock at half past nine from a panel at the duty desk and the room doors do not lock at all, because a lock on a room door is a door somebody must be able to open in a fire, and a door somebody can open is not a lock, it is a piece of theatre that costs one hundred and ninety rand a door.

The induction is forty minutes. There is a video in it. He is in the video, from 2041, with more hair.

His room was in Block C, on the north veranda, three and a half metres by four, with a window that opened on a stay and a wardrobe and a bed and a table and a chair and a shelf, and a strip of four paint colours screwed to the inside of the wardrobe door from which a resident may choose, once, at admission. He did not choose. The room stayed the cream it had been for whoever was in it before him.

He was on the roll for the first time on the Monday, printed and pinned in the mess with the week's menu and the clinic hours:

MOTAUNG, J.T. — C14.

The roll ran to nineteen pages that week and the total at the bottom was 11,351.

He read it the way he had read the distribution for nineteen years, down the fields that mattered, and on page two he found BALOYI, C. — F31, and did not go and look for her, then or afterwards.

The work programme allocates on a form with three lines for a preference. He left the lines blank, which the clerk told him was unusual, and the allocation came back on the Thursday as laundry.

The laundry is behind the kitchen: four industrial washers, two of them from 2038 and two from 2049, six tumble driers, a folding table nine metres long, and a steam press with a foot bar. It does the clinic, the kitchen, the school, and the two blocks that have no machines of their own, and it runs two shifts. The work credit is eleven rand a day into an account you can spend at the tuck shop or send out. He had signed the rate in 2036, when it was eleven rand.

He was on sheets. Sheets is the table, not the press. You take a sheet out of the drier at the shoulders, you and the man opposite you, and you walk two steps towards each other and you do not talk while you do it because you cannot hear over the driers, and then it goes on the pile and you take the next one, and after two hours your forearms are the part of you that is tired.

In the first week a man in the mess picked up his tray and moved to the far end of the table when he sat down, twice. The third time he did not, and it was not forgiveness. It was that carrying it every day is work, and the man had a shift at six.

Nobody called him Director. The staff called him Mr Motaung, which is correct and which is in the manual. The residents mostly called him nothing at all, the way you call nothing at all a man you queue behind.

The second Saturday in December was a visiting day.

Gate 2 opens at nine and the buses get in at twenty past eight, and the residents wait on the inside on a run of benches under a shade structure that is the twin of the one on the visitors' side, put up by the same contractor in the same month, because a covered wait was specified for both sides of the gate and he had specified it.

He sat on the bench with his hands on his knees and watched it come the other way.

The queue on the far side of the boom starts before seven. A woman

with two children and a cooler bag was at the front of it and had been there long enough that the children had stopped asking. There is a noticeboard in a lockable glass case with the year's dates laminated in two columns, and a painted line on the concrete, and a rule that visitors may bring in food in a clear bag, and a rule that a child under twelve may sit on a lap, and a two-hour session with a bell at the end of it that is not a bell, it is a staff member walking down the tables saying *dankie, dis tyd* to each table in turn, one table at a time, so that no family in the hall hears the end of their two hours announced to the room.

He had approved that in 2044 as a change to module nine.

Miriam came off the Springs bus.

She had a bag from Checkers with three things in it that had been checked at the gate and one thing that had not been allowed, which was a pair of nail scissors, and she came down the concrete and through into the hall and put the bag on the table and sat down and looked at him for a while.

"Your shirt's got a mark on it," she said.

"I know where the laundry is."

"Then use it."

They had two hours. She had brought the *Beeld* and the *Sowetan* from Wednesday and a tin of Nescafé and a photograph of the yard with the plumbago coming over the wall, taken from the kitchen door, badly, with her thumb in it.

They talked about the yard, and the gutter over the stoep, and the man who was going to look at the gutter and had not come. Twice she stopped in the middle of a sentence and went on with a different one.

At two minutes past twelve a woman in an Estate golf shirt came down the tables saying *dankie, dis tyd*, one table at a time, and Miriam picked up the Checkers bag and gave it to him and put her hand flat on the table for a second next to his and then took it back and stood up.

He watched the bus go out from the inside of the gate, which is a thing he had never done, and then walked back up past the field to

Block C, and at half past one he was on the table, because Saturday afternoon is the visitors' hall linen and there is always a load after visits.

In January she came to live there.

Regulation 24 is on page 61 of the subordinate legislation and he had not read it in eleven years:

24. RESIDENCE OF A SPOUSE

- (1) The spouse of a resident may on written application reside with the resident at the Estate.
- (2) An applicant under this regulation is not a resident and is not subject to an order, and may depart on written notice.
- (3) An application shall not be refused on the ground that the order in respect of the resident is of indefinite duration.

Subregulation (3) is the sentence. It is the only sentence in the regulations that anticipates a person saying no to somebody for that reason and forbids it in advance, and it is drafted the way a person drafts when they have already had the argument in a room.

He asked the superintendent's office who had put it in. It took them a month, because they had to write to Pretoria, and what came back was a minute of the drafting subcommittee of 14 October 2036 recording that "a further provision relating to spouses was inserted," with no name against it, and an attendance list of nine people, four of whom were dead.

Four spouses in nineteen years. Two had died. One had left in 2051 after fourteen months. The fourth was still in the second of the four semidetached units behind Block A that everybody calls the married quarters, and had been since 2043, and did the flowers for the chapel.

Miriam came out on a Tuesday in a bakkie with a driver from a company in Silverton, with two suitcases, a box of kitchen things, the kettle, four boxes of books, and the ledger.

The ledger is A4, hardcover, and there were ten of them and the current volume, which had no cover on it yet. The ten were in brown paper, and the paper was labelled in her ballpoint, KONFYT 2043-44

at one end and KONFYT 52-53 at the other. They went on the shelf in the front room of unit three at eye height with the spines out, and she did not put anything in front of them.

The Estate does not search a spouse's effects beyond the gate check for the schedule items, which is alcohol, weapons, medication and cash over a limit. The driver carried the boxes in. A clerk from admin came at four with a form for the meter reading and stood in that room for six minutes and looked at the shelf the way people look at a shelf, and said the geyser had a two-hour timer and you learn to work with it, and left.

Nobody asked. Not that week and not afterwards.

CAS 447/11/2027 had come in with him, flat in the blue bag under the four shirts, on the ninth of November, and had been in the wardrobe in C14 since. He fetched it across that week and stood it on the shelf at the end of the row of ledgers, and neither of them said anything about that either.

She got the library.

The library is in the 2038 wing with the good windows and it opens at five in the morning because a resident committee wrote a letter in 2047. It had one part-time post, filled by a woman from Delmas who drove out three days a week and had given notice in November. Miriam is not staff and cannot hold the post. She does it anyway, five days, unpaid, because the alternative was that it opens three days, and the Estate's administration made the arrangement in a way that does not appear on an organogram.

She catalogued it in six weeks. It had never been catalogued. It has four thousand two hundred and eleven books, of which about six hundred are unreadable, and eleven Bibles in four languages, and a run of *Farmer's Weekly* from 2039 to 2044 that somebody donated and nobody has ever opened.

Then she started the other thing.

She takes a name a day, sometimes two, in the library, at the end table, with a resident sitting opposite her: name, date of birth, where from, when named, which block, who visits, what work. She writes it

by hand. She does not write it down when a person says something she has not asked for and she does not ask anything she has not written on the sheet, and she tells each one at the start that this is her own paper, that it is not the Estate's and it is not the Directorate's, and that they may say no, and about one in six say no.

By the end of March she had four hundred and forty-one of them.

Eleven thousand three hundred and fifty-one is thirty-one years at one a day.

She knows that. She did the arithmetic in front of him at the table with a pen, the first week, and then put the pen down and got on with it, and it was the most patient thing he had ever watched a person do, and he could hardly stay in the room while she did it.

The representations table was not a decision either.

A woman in the laundry queue asked him in January whether *further particulars* on the annual review form meant she had to write what she was accused of, because she did not know what she was accused of. It does not mean that. It means anything the resident wishes the magistrate to have. He told her what it meant, and then he told her that the paragraph about her employment should go before the paragraph about her children and not after, because the form is read from the top and by paragraph four the reader is skimming.

After that people came to the library on Tuesdays with the form.

There is a duty advocate. The number is on the back of the card in eleven-point. Legal Aid sends a candidate attorney out twice a year to a room in the admin block and she is twenty-six and good and has four days for the year and a caseload of eleven thousand.

The reviews come back in September in a batch. There is a list, and the list has a signature on the last page of it, one signature, and the orders on it are renewed.

He knows what happens to the representations. He wrote the guidance that says the magistrate shall consider any representations. He also knows what a batch of eleven thousand looks like on a Thursday afternoon, and he sat at the table on Tuesdays and helped people put the employment paragraph before the children paragraph, and every

one of those pages was going to be in that batch, and he went on doing it, because a badly ordered page is worse than a well ordered one for no reason at all.

Amos Rakoma came to the table on the third Tuesday in February.

He was on the press in the laundry, fifty-eight, from Daveyton, a panel beater for twenty-two years before, with the forearms for it and a burn on the inside of the left one from the press that he said was the only one in eight years and that he was going to keep it that way. He paid a funeral policy at one hundred and eighty-seven rand a month, debited off his work account, R11 a day and R187 a month, which does not work, and his sister made up the difference for the first four years and then it went to a nephew.

He put the form on the table and sat down and said, "It's the ninth one."

"Ninth."

"Ja. June it's nine years."

Motaung turned the form round. It was the current version, the 2052 one, four pages, and Rakoma had filled in the front sheet in block capitals in blue pen, correctly, the way a man fills in a form he has filled in eight times before.

"When were you named?"

"Sixth of June, 2046."

Motaung sat with the form in his hand.

There had been four months in 2046 between deputies. Bhengu had gone to Justice at the end of March and the post had been advertised and readvertised because the first advertisement had gone out with the wrong salary band, and the appointment had only come in August, and for those four months the authorisation of uptakes could not be delegated below the Deputy Director's level, so it had come to him. It came in batches, twice a day, and he had signed them at his desk at seven in the morning and at half past four in the afternoon, and he had read each one, and there had been about three hundred of them.

"Then I authorised it," he said. "It would have been me. That year, between March and August, it was me."

Rakoma nodded, once, and did not move, and did not look away either.

"I know," he said. "It's on the paper. The paper's got a name on it, they gave me the paper at the beginning, it's in my room."

The driers went on the other side of the wall and could not be heard from the library, which is on the other side of the property; it was quiet in there, and there was a man asleep in the chair by the window with a newspaper over his face, and somebody's radio was going in the courtyard.

"Mr Rakoma —"

"No." Rakoma put two fingers on the form and turned it back round so that it faced him. "I'm not asking you for that."

He straightened the form on the table with both hands until it was square to the edge.

"Nine years I'm writing this thing. My sister doesn't talk to me. Nine years. Because I thought about it, you understand, a man sits and he thinks about it, who was it, who did they say I was going to do, and they don't tell you, so you make it up, and I made up that it was her husband, because of a thing that happened at a funeral in 2045 that was nothing. And I said it to her in the visiting hall in 2047, out loud, that they must have meant him. That's what I said to my own sister."

He turned the last page of the form over and flattened the fold with the side of his hand.

"So. You know the form." He pushed it two centimetres across the table. "You write it. You know what they read."

Motaung wrote it. It took forty minutes and he did the sister paragraph second and the employment paragraph first, and it went into the September batch, and it will be refused in the September batch, and he knew that while he was writing it.

The next week in the laundry Rakoma showed him the trick with a collar on the press, which is that you do the stand first and then the points, and if you do it the other way round you set a line into the

fold that does not come out. Two men at a press, one shift, and the man who has been there eight years shows the new one, or the linen comes back wrong and the kitchen complains, and it is not anything else, and he did not let himself make it into anything else.

The nets went up in February.

The maintenance requisition had gone in as consumables with a three-year replacement cycle and had been approved in Pretoria before Christmas, and the notice on the mess board thanked the Estate manager, and the league's committee bought a cake out of the tuck-shop fund and there is a photograph of it somewhere.

Nobody knew. He had told a contractor on a perimeter road at twenty past four in the morning to resubmit it under a different budget line, and the contractor had written it in a notebook, and it had worked, and that is the whole of it. It cost four nets. It changed the retrieval of the ball from behind the goal, which had been done by whoever was nearest the mielies, and that is what it changed.

The league is two divisions, six teams, a table pinned in the mess, referees off the staff roster, and a final on a visiting weekend so that families can watch. The cup is named after a resident who died in 2048 of an ordinary thing at fifty-one. That is what the cup being named after somebody means here.

He went down to the field on Saturdays and stood at the corner where the ground is highest by about a metre, with the other men who stand there, and did not join anything and was not asked to.

In March the clinic did the over-sixties, which is a blood pressure, a fasting glucose and eight minutes with the doctor. His pressure was up and he was put on the same tablet the country puts everybody on, ten milligrams, and the sister took it out of a stock cupboard that was full, and the dialysis chair in the next room had somebody in it.

The clinic was built with the money that came out of the continuous-capture line in 2046. He had defended that trade in front of the audit committee, and he had been right, and it is a good clinic, and he took the tablet in the mornings with the coffee.

Past the cemetery wall the mown ground goes on for about the same

distance again beyond the last row of markers. He walked the perimeter path in the evenings, on the inside, four metres in, and it takes an hour and fifty minutes to do the whole nine and a half kilometres and he did it most days.

Sixty-one. The table gives a South African man of sixty-one about seventeen years, and rather more if somebody is checking his pressure and there is a dialysis chair in the next room, so call it twenty, and the ground past the last row is enough for about eight hundred.

He ran the number once, in the third week of February, walking, and did not run it again.

The newspapers come out three days late with the linen truck and they go in the library on the rack.

The Federation's application went on. The founding affidavit had been deposed to by Grobler, and a founding affidavit whose deponent is dead is not thereby worthless, but the parts of it that are argument in the mouth of the man who ran the East Rand through the Brownouts are, in March, argument in the mouth of a dead man that cannot be tested. They filed a notice of substitution of the deponent. The new chairman is a woman from a company in Midrand and the two paragraphs in the *Sunday Times* quoted her once and had her title wrong.

The part about the two-of-three warrants was still thin. They had said in November that they would amplify it and they had not; the supplementary affidavit was outstanding, and the matter was postponed in March to the second term for the filing of it.

The case is correct. It was correct in November. It is now the case of the men whose chairman was shot by the Director of Preventive Enforcement, and it will be heard that way for as long as anybody in the room remembers the morning, which is longer than the second term.

It is weaker without him. He was the only one of them who had buried anybody.

In the *Government Gazette* of 6 March, A. Cassim was appointed Director of Preventive Enforcement with effect from 1 December, and

the Directorate had not missed him for a single day.

The last Saturday in March was a visiting day.

He walked down past the field at twenty past eight, and the buses were in, and the queue was on the far side of the boom with the cooler bags, and on the near side the men were on the bench under the shade structure with their hands on their knees, and a man he did not know was having his collar straightened by another man he did not know.

Miriam was in the library, because she is not a visitor and does not queue, and the library opens at five.

He went on past Gate 2 and down behind the kitchen and put the first load in at half past eight, because there is always a load after visits, and the eleven tablecloths from the hall come back every second weekend with the same three stains on them, cooldrink and gravy and the orange one nobody has identified, and they come out, and they go back on the shelf, and in a fortnight there they are again.

The Seat

April 2055

The chairs came out of the store room at one o'clock, forty of them, and he had worked out in January that they carried better in sixes than in eights. Eight was what the manual said. The manual had been written by somebody costing a store room, not by a man carrying chairs across sixty metres of grass in April.

He put them out in pairs at the tables, and the tables were plastic and had been the same plastic tables since 2039, because he had signed the order for them.

Visitors' hour on the second Saturday ran from two until four. By half past one the queue at the gate was down past the poplars and there were women in it with cooler bags, and a man in a suit who came every second Saturday for a son and who had not once, in five months, taken the jacket off.

April on the Highveld does what it does. The grass had gone off at the edges and the mornings had teeth in them and the soccer league had two rounds left, which meant Sedibe was walking around all week with the exercise book under his arm working out who could still catch B Block. Sedibe was sixty-four. He kept the log in a Croxley three-quire with the times of the goals in it and a column for weather, and he had a theory about the wind on the top field that he would explain to anybody who did not walk away fast enough.

Motaung set out the last six chairs and went to see about the urn.

Miriam did two mornings a week in the library and then came out for

visitors' hour, because she had worked out early that the hour was hardest on the people who had nobody coming and easiest on the people who had something to do. She brought two enamel cups over and put them down and did not sit.

"They've sent the June list," she said. "There's nothing on it."

"Nothing at all?"

"Two Wilbur Smiths and a Bible in Setswana. Sixty-one requests on the form and they sent three books." She looked at the gate. "That's her car."

He turned. It was a state Corolla, white, with the government plate, and it had come up the access road at a speed that said the driver had been out here before and knew about the third cattle grid.

"Ja," he said.

"I'm going in at half past," Miriam said. "Ephraim wants the shelves moved and he wants it done while there's nobody in there to have an opinion about it."

She took her hand off the back of his chair and went, and she went before she was asked to, which she had been doing since December and which neither of them had ever mentioned.

Ayesha Cassim signed the book at the gate like everybody else.

He watched her do it from a hundred metres away. She stood at the counter and wrote her name and her identity number and the time of her arrival, and put her bag through the tray, and took the yellow tag and clipped it on, and said something to Mahlangu that made him laugh. Then she came up the path in the sun in a grey suit with a folder under her arm, and she looked like a woman who had been at her desk since five and had another four hours in her.

"Director," she said.

"Don't."

"Sorry. Habit." She sat down opposite him and put the folder on the table and squared it to the edge without appearing to. "It's not a good habit. Naidoo does it too. She says 'the Director' about you

and then has to say 'the other Director' about me, and now half the operations floor is saying it, and there's nothing I can do about it because if I raise it, it becomes a thing."

"Let it die on its own."

"That's what I'm doing." She looked at the cups. "Is this tea?"

"It's what comes out of that urn."

She drank some of it and did not say anything about it, which he thought was the most courteous thing anybody had done in that field all month.

"Piet's gone," she said.

He put his cup down.

"The knee?"

"The knee. He went in for it in January and it went badly and they gave him the medical pension in February. He wanted to see out the twenty. He was fourteen months short." She turned the cup on the table. "There was a thing in the canteen. Sixty people. They gave him a clock, which is what we give people, and he made a speech and it was about the lifts."

"Who's on the door now?"

"A company. Two guards, three shifts, and the tender came in eleven per cent under what Piet cost us."

"Do they ask for the card?"

"They ask for the card," Cassim said. "They ask me for it every morning. They just don't know whose face they're looking at."

He nodded and left it there, and she let him.

The families were coming up from the gate now in ones and twos, and the noise on the lawn changed the way it always did at about ten past, from nothing to too much. Somebody's small boy came past their table at a flat run with a cooler bag lid in his hand for no reason that would ever be explained.

"What was the quarter?" Motaung said.

"You'll see it in the gazette."

"I'm asking you."

"Forty-one," she said. "For the province. January to March."

Forty-one. In 2029 this province had done that in nine days.

"And the Estate?"

"Eleven thousand six hundred and eighty-two, as at Thursday." She said it the way you say a number you have had to say in a committee room that month. "The intake's running about four per cent up on last year. Not because the machine's got hungrier. Because the population's got bigger and the base rate hasn't moved."

"It won't."

"No," she said. "It won't."

She opened the folder, looked at what was in it, and closed it again without taking anything out.

"I'm going to tell you about March," she said, "and then I'm going to sit here and drink this tea, and you can do whatever you want with it."

"All right."

"The review of section fourteen sub six was set down for the second week of March. It ran four days. I chaired it, because the committee asked me to chair it and there was no honest reason to say no." She had her hands flat on the folder. "We heard the Law Society, we heard two silks, we heard the Federation's people, we heard the duty advocates' association, and we heard Sibanda for the Directorate, who did not enjoy it. We had the whole store in front of us. Not summaries. The store."

"How many?"

"Four hundred and thirty-one dissents on file since 2043."

"Four hundred and nine," he said.

"Four hundred and thirty-one, as at March." She let that sit exactly as long as it needed to sit. "I read them, Josiah. Every one. It took nine days and I did it at home because I wasn't going to have a clerk carry them up and down in a trolley."

Down at the far end of the lawn a woman had brought a birthday cake in and there was an argument going on about candles, which were not permitted, and about matches, which were extremely not permitted, and Mahlangu was walking down there with his hands already up in the shape of a man about to lose an argument gracefully.

“And I renewed it,” Cassim said.

He did not say anything.

“I want to give you the count, because you gave it to me in October and I didn’t believe you then.” She said it flatly, and she looked at him while she said it, and she did not blink and she did not soften a thing. “Repeal the seal and every named person’s representative gets the store. Inside a month somebody puts a sealed finding in front of a full bench and asks how a two-of-three finding can be an anticipated certainty when a Reader with the same file said no. That question doesn’t stop at the seal. It goes straight through to the concurrence test and the concurrence test doesn’t survive it, because the concurrence test has been a fiction since 2049 and everybody in that room in March was one honest afternoon away from working it out.

“Then every two-of-three warrant in nineteen years is contestable. Sibanda’s estimate is eighteen months to empty the Estate, and he’s optimistic because he’s paid to be. Call it two years.

“And of the eleven thousand six hundred and eighty-two, some number were correctly named. I don’t know the number. Nobody knows the number. Nobody can know the number, and that is not an accident of the record, it is the design, and you wrote the paragraph.” She stopped for a moment. “The ranges I was given ran from one in nine to one in three. I asked for the working. The working is honest and it is worthless, and both of the men who gave it to me said so out loud, in front of a committee, which I want on the record was decent of them.”

“One in nine,” Motaung said.

“One in nine of eleven thousand six hundred is nearly thirteen hundred people. One in three is nearly four thousand.” Cassim picked up her tea and put it down without drinking any. “I sat with a page in front of me for two days with the words *the provision is not reason-*

able and justifiable in an open and democratic society typed at the top of it, and I have believed that sentence since I was twenty-four years old, and I could not put my name under it.”

The wind came up the way it comes up at three. Somebody’s paper plate went off a table and travelled.

“So I wrote the other one,” she said. “Two paragraphs. It’s renewed to March 2060. I signed it on the nineteenth.”

He looked at the fence.

“I’m not asking you to tell me it was right,” Cassim said. “I came because it’ll be gazetted in June and I’d rather you heard it from me sitting down.”

For a while neither of them said anything, which was not difficult on that lawn, because the lawn was loud.

“I got two things,” she said eventually. “I’d like you to know what they are so that you can decide what they’re worth, because I’ve decided and I’d like a second opinion from somebody who isn’t in the building.

“From the first of June the uptake is forty minutes instead of twenty. And there’s a second call — one at the address and one from the vehicle, not one at the address and the rest of them from the Estate that evening when everybody you know is at work and not answering.” She said it precisely, the way she said everything. “I ran the study myself. Forty minutes doesn’t move the neighbour numbers. That was the objection and it was a real objection and it turned out to be wrong.”

“Who fought it?”

“Nobody fought it. That’s the thing. It took four months and a costing and two committees and nobody in any room was against it, and it still took four months.” She almost smiled. “And the duty advocate’s number goes on the front of the card in fourteen point. It’s been on the back in eight point since 2035 and eleven per cent of them never turn the card over.”

“That’s a real number,” he said.

"It's a real number."

"Forty minutes," Motaung said, "is a real thing."

"It's a real thing and it is worth almost nothing and I'm going to do it again in September with the family visits," Cassim said, "and I know exactly what you're thinking, and you're not going to say it, and I'd rather you didn't."

He had not been going to say it.

He reached down under his chair, where it had been since half past twelve, and put it on the table between the cups.

Old cardboard, the kind that had stopped being issued before the Brownouts, gone soft at the corners and furred along the top edge, with a perished rubber band that Miriam had replaced in February with one off a bunch of spring onions. The reference was on the cover in his own handwriting from when his handwriting had been better.

Cassim looked at it and did not pick it up.

"Take it," he said.

She read the cover the way an advocate reads a CAS number, left to right, the year last. Then she picked it up and put it in her bag, between the folder and a lunch box, and did the zip.

She did not ask. He had thought about that a great deal in the eleven days since he had decided to do it, and he had arrived at no useful prediction, and she did not ask.

"Ayesha," he said.

"Mm."

"It isn't the man. It was never the man." He said it in the voice he used for budgets. "The seat draws the finding. Sit in it long enough and you accumulate the shape of somebody the instrument has an opinion about — you're in the packets, you're in the diary, you're on the radio, you make an enemy with a legal fund and a public quarrel and no prior contact of record. One of these mornings your name will come up on the six o'clock distribution and you will read the window

and the victim field before you read the name, because that is what nineteen years teaches your eyes to do. It will be you. Not because of anything you've done. Because of where you sit."

The birthday cake had been resolved. It had been resolved by Mahlangu producing a lighter of his own from his own pocket and standing over it while it was done, which was against three separate standing instructions and which everybody on that lawn was going to forget by Monday.

Cassim watched the candles.

"They've moved the suppression," she said. "It runs at four in the morning now. Not half past six."

"Since when?"

"Since the second week of December. It was the first thing I signed." She turned her cup a quarter turn on the table. "It goes to the chair of the review committee, not to the Deputy. So it doesn't come to anybody in the building."

He did not answer that, and she did not put anything on top of it.

"There's a Reader's note on Finding C," she said. "Did you ever see it?"

"No."

"You wouldn't have. It's not in the served packet, it's in the file." She looked at him. "I read the files now. All of them, on my own name, since January. It's the only part of the job nobody can do for me and I've stopped pretending otherwise."

"Say it."

She said it the way you say something you have read enough times to have stopped needing the paper.

"The subject will have read the two findings above this one before he acts. I have been asked what he will do. I have answered what he will do. I do not believe this is a prediction and I am asking, in writing, what it is."

The wind came across the top field and moved the crossbar netting, which needed replacing, and which was on a form.

Cassim picked up her tea, found it cold, and drank it anyway.

"Miriam says the library's had sixty-one requests and got three books," she said. "Is that right?"

"That's right."

"Large print?"

"Half of it."

"I'll send large print," she said. "I can do that out of the welfare line without asking anybody, and it's about the only thing I can do out of the welfare line without asking anybody."

She stood up and put her chair back under the table, which nobody did, and picked up her bag.

"They'll open the bag at the gate," Motaung said. "Mahlangu will want to look inside it, and he'll ask you what it is. Tell him it's paper."

"It is paper."

"Then that'll be true," he said, "and it'll be quick."

He walked her as far as the white line on the path, which was painted across the tar sixty metres short of the visitors' gate and repainted every September, and which he had specified in 2038, and he stopped on it.

"March 2060," she said. "It comes up again in five years."

"It'll come up again in five years."

"Ja."

She went on down the path and gave Mahlangu the bag and he opened it and looked inside it and said something, and she said something, and he closed it and gave it back and lifted the boom by hand because the motor had been off since Tuesday. The Corolla went out and turned right at the cattle grid and was on the district road and then behind the poplars and then gone.

Four o'clock. The families were coming down in a long straggle with their empty cooler bags and there was the usual business at the gate about the register, because everybody had to sign out and nobody ever wanted to be the one holding the queue up while they did it.

Motaung went back up the lawn and started on the chairs.

Sixes. He got the first six under his arm and carried them to the store room and came back, and Sedibe fell in beside him without being asked and started on the tables from the far end, still talking about the wind on the top field.

There was a paper cup up against the fence at the bottom of the lawn where the wind always put them, wedged into the diamond mesh about a metre off the ground. He went down for it. The wire was cold on the backs of his fingers, the way it went cold out here from about four in the afternoon in April, and he worked the cup out of the aperture without tearing it, and flattened it with his thumb, and put it in the bin by the tap.

Then he went back for the chairs.



Klaus

Custos, non Conditor