

The Originist

by Orson Scott Card

LEYEL FORSKA SAT BEFORE HIS LECTOR DISPLAY, READING through an array of recently published scholarly papers. A holograph of two pages of text hovered in the air before him. The display was rather larger than most people needed their pages to be, since Level's eyes were no younger than the rest of him. When he came to the end he did not press the PAGE key to continue the article. Instead he pressed NEXT.

The two pages he had been reading slid backward about a centimeter, joining a dozen previously discarded articles, all standing in the air over the lector. With a soft beep, a new pair of pages appeared in front of the old ones.

Deet spoke up from where she sat eating breakfast. "You 're only giving the poor soul *two pages* before you consign him to the wastebin?"

"I'm consigning him to oblivion," Level answered cheerfully. "No, I'm consigning him to hell."

"What? Have you rediscovered religion in your old age?"

"I'm creating one. It has no heaven, but it has a terrible everlasting hell for young scholars who think they can make their reputation by attacking my work. "

"Ah, you have a theology," said Deet. "Your work is holy writ, and to attack it is blasphemy. "

"I welcome *intelligent* attacks. But this young tubeheaded professor from—yes, of course, Minus University—"

"Old Minus U?"

"He thinks he can refute me, destroy me, lay me in the dust, and all he has bothered to cite are studies published within the last thousand years. "

"The principle of millennial depth is still widely used—"

"The principle of millennial depth is the confession of modern scholars that they are not willing to spend as much effort on research as they do on academic politics. I shattered the principle of millennial depth thirty years ago. I proved that it was"

"Stupid and outmoded. But my dearest darling sweetheart Level, you did it by spending part of the immeasurably vast Forska fortune to search for inaccessible and forgotten archives in every section of the Empire."

"Neglected and decaying. I had to reconstruct half of them."

"It would take a thousand universities' library budgets to match what you spent on research for 'Human Origin on the Null Planet.' "

"But once I spent the money, all those archives were open. They *have* been open for three decades. The *serious* scholars all use them, since millennial depth yields nothing but predigested, pre-excreted muck. They search among the turds of rats who have devoured elephants, hoping to find ivory. "

"So colorful an image. My breakfast tastes much better now.. " She slid her tray into the cleaning slot and glared at him. "Why are you so snappish? You used to read me sections from their silly little papers and we'd laugh. Lately you're just nasty."

Level sighed. "Maybe it's because I once dreamed of changing the galaxy, and every day's mail brings more evidence that the galaxy refuses to change."

"Nonsense. Hari Seldon has promised that the Empire will fall any day now."

There. She had said Hari's name. Even though she had too much tact to speak openly of what bothered him, she was hinting that Level's bad humor was because he was still waiting for Hari Seldon's answer. Maybe so—Level wouldn't deny it. It *was* annoying that it had taken Hari so long to respond. Level had expected a call the day Hari got his application. At least within the week. But he wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of admitting that the waiting bothered him. "The Empire will be killed by its

own refusal to change. I rest my case. “

“Well, I hope you have a wonderful morning, growling and grumbling about the stupidity of everyone in origin studies—except your esteemed self.”

“Why are you teasing me about my vanity today? I’ve always been vain.”

“I consider it one of your most endearing traits.”

“At least I make an effort to live up to my own opinion of myself.”

“That’s nothing. You even live up to *my* opinion of you.” She kissed the bald spot on the top of his head as she breezed by, heading for the bathroom.

Leyel turned his attention to the new essay at the front of the lector display. It was a name he didn’t recognize. Fully prepared to find pretentious writing and puerile thought, he was surprised to find himself becoming quite absorbed. This woman had been following a trail of primate studies—a field so long neglected that there simply *were* no papers within the range of millennial depth. Already he knew she was his kind of scholar. She even mentioned the fact that she was using archives opened by the Forska Research Foundation. Leyel was not above being pleased at this tacit expression of gratitude.

It seemed that the woman—a Dr. Thoren Magolissian—had been following Leyel’s lead, searching for the *principles* of human origin rather than wasting time on the irrelevant search for one particular planet. She had uncovered a trove of primate research from three millennia ago, which was based on chimpanzee and gorilla studies dating back to seven thousand years ago. The earliest of these had referred to original research so old it may have been conducted before the founding of the Empire—but those most ancient reports had not yet been located. They probably didn’t exist any more. Texts abandoned for more than five thousand years were very hard to restore; texts older than eight thousand years were simply unreadable. It was tragic, how many texts had been “stored” by librarians who never checked them, never refreshed or recopied them. Presiding over vast archives that had lost every scrap of readable information. All neatly catalogued, of course, so you knew *exactly* what it was that humanity had lost forever.

Never mind.

Magolissian’s article. What startled Leyel was her conclusion that primitive language capability seemed to be inherent in the primate mind. Even in primates incapable of speech, other symbols could easily be learned—at least for simple nouns and verbs—and the nonhuman primates could come up with sentences and ideas that had never been spoken to them. This meant that mere production of language, per se, was prehuman, or at least not the determining factor of humanness.

It was a dazzling thought. It meant that the difference between humans and nonhumans—the real origin of humans in recognizably human form—was post-linguistic. Of course this came as a direct contradiction of one of Leyel’s own assertions in an early paper—he had said that “since language is what separates human from beast, historical linguistics may provide the key to human origins”—but this was the sort of contradiction he welcomed. He wished he could shout at the other fellow, make him look at Magolissian’s article. See? This is how to do it! Challenge my assumption, not my conclusion, and do it with new evidence instead of trying to twist the old stuff. Cast a light in the darkness, don’t just chum up the same old sediment at the bottom of the river.

Before he could get into the main body of the article, however, the house computer informed him that someone was at the door of the apartment. It was a message that crawled along the bottom of the lector display. Leyel pressed the key that brought the message to the front, in letters large enough to read. For the thousandth time he wished that sometime in the decamillennia of human history, somebody had invented a computer capable of *speech*.

“Who is it?” Leyel typed.

A moment’s wait, while the house computer interrogated the visitor.

The answer appeared on the lector: “Secure courier with a message for Leyel Forska.”

The very fact that the courier had got past house security meant that it was genuine—and important. Leyel typed again. “From?”

Another pause. “Hari Seldon of the Encyclopedia Galactica Foundation.”

Leyel was out of his chair in a moment. He got to the door even before the house computer could open it, and without a word took the message in his hands. Fumbling a bit, he pressed the top and bottom of the black glass lozenge to prove by fingerprint that it was he, by body temperature and pulse that he was alive to receive it. Then, when the courier and her bodyguards were gone, he dropped the message into the chamber of his lector and watched the page appear in the air before him.

At the top was a three-dimensional version of the logo of Hari ‘s Encyclopedia Foundation. Soon to be my insignia as well, thought Leyel. Hari Seldon and I, the two greatest scholars of our time, joined together in a project whose scope surpasses anything ever attempted by any man or group of men. The gathering together of all the knowledge of the Empire in a systematic, easily accessible way, to preserve it through the coming time of anarchy so that a new civilization can quickly rise out of the ashes of the old. Hari had the vision to foresee the need. And I, Leyel Forska, have the understanding of all the old archives that will make the Encyclopedia Galactica possible.

Leyel started reading with a confidence born of experience; had he ever really desired anything and been denied?

My dear friend:

I was surprised and honored to see an application from you and insisted on writing your answer personally. It is gratifying beyond measure that you believe in the Foundation enough to apply to take part. I can truthfully tell you that we have received no application from any other scholar of your distinction and accomplishment.

Of course, thought Leyel. There *is* no other scholar of my stature, except Hari himself, and perhaps Deet, once her current work is published. At least we have no equals by the standards that Hari and I have always recognized as valid. Hari created the science of psychohistory. I transformed and revitalized the field of originism.

And yet the tone of Hari’s letter was wrong. It sounded like—flattery. That was it. Hari was softening the coming blow. Leyel knew before reading it what the next paragraph would say.

Nevertheless, Leyel, I must reply in the negative. The Foundation on Terminus is designed to collect and preserve knowledge. Your life’s work has been devoted to expanding it. You are the opposite of the sort of researcher we need. Far better for you to remain on Trantor and continue your inestimably valuable studies, while lesser men and women exile themselves on Terminus.

Your servant,

Hari

Did Hari imagine Leyel to be so vain he would read these flattering words and preen himself contentedly? Did he think Leyel would believe that this was the real reason his application was being denied? Could Hari Seldon misknow a man so badly?

Impossible. Hari Seldon, of all people in the Empire, knew how to know other people. True, his great work in psychohistory dealt with large masses of people, with populations and probabilities. But Hari’s fascination with populations had grown out of his interest in and understanding of individuals. Besides, he and Hari had been friends since Hari first arrived on Trantor. Hadn’t a grant from Leyel’s own research fund financed most of Hari’s original research? Hadn’t they held long conversations in the early days, tossing ideas back and forth, each helping the other hone his thoughts? They may not have seen each other much in the last—what, five years? Six?—but they were adults, not children. They didn’t need constant visits in order to remain friends. And this was not the letter a true friend would send to Leyel Forska. Even if, doubtful as it might seem, Hari Seldon really meant to turn him down, he would not suppose for a moment that Leyel would be content with a letter like *this*.

Surely Hari would have known that it would be like a taunt to Leyel Forska. “Lesser men and women,” indeed! The Foundation on Terminus was so valuable to Hari Seldon that he had been willing to risk death on charges of treason in order to launch the project. It was unlikely in the extreme that he would populate Terminus with second-raters. No, this was the form letter sent to placate prominent

scholars who were judged unfit for the Foundation. Hari would have known Leye would immediately recognize it as such.

There was only one possible conclusion. "Hari could not have written this letter," Leye said.

"Of course he could," Deet told him, blunt as always. She had come out of the bathroom in her dressing gown and read the letter over his shoulder.

"If *you* think so then I truly *am* hurt," said Leye. He got up, poured a cup of peshat, and began to sip it. He studiously avoided looking at Deet.

"Don't pout, Leye. Think of the problems Hari is facing. He has so little time, so much to do. A hundred thousand people to transport to Terminus, most of the resources of the Imperial Library to duplicate"

"He already *had* those people—"

"All in six months since his trial ended. No wonder we haven't seen him, socially or professionally, in—years. A decade!"

"You're saying that he no longer knows me? Unthinkable."

"I'm saying that he knows you very well. He knew you would recognize his message as a form letter. He also knew that you would understand at once what this meant. "

"Well, then, my dear, he overestimated me. I do *not* understand what it means, unless it means he did not send it himself."

"Then you're getting old, and I'm ashamed of you. I shall deny we are married and pretend you are my idiot uncle whom I allow to live with me out of charity. I'll tell the children they were illegitimate. They'll be very sad to learn they won't inherit a bit of the Forska estate."

He threw a crumb of toast at her. "You are a cruel and disloyal wench, and I regret raising you out of poverty and obscurity. I only did it for pity, you know. "

This was an old tease of theirs. She had commanded a decent fortune in her own right, though of course Leye's dwarfed it. And, technically, he *was* her uncle, since her stepmother was Leye's older half sister Zenna. It was all very complicated. Zenna had been born to Leye's mother when she was married to someone else—before she married Leye's father. So while Zenna was well dowered, she had no part in the Forska fortune. Leye's father, amused at the situation, once remarked, "Poor Zenna. Lucky you. My semen flows with gold." Such are the ironies that come with great fortune. Poor people don't have to make such terrible distinctions between their children.

Deet's father, however, assumed that a Forska was a Forska, and so, several years after Deet had married Leye, he decided that it wasn't enough for his daughter to be married to uncountable wealth, he ought to do the same favor for himself. He *said*, of course, that he loved Zenna to distraction, and cared nothing for fortune, but only Zenna believed him. Therefore she married him. Thus Leye's half sister became Deet's stepmother, which made Leye his wife's stepuncle—and his own stepuncle-in-law. A dynastic tangle that greatly amused Leye and Deet.

Leye of course compensated for Zenna's lack of inheritance with a lifetime stipend that amounted to ten times her husband's income each year. It had the happy effect of keeping Deet's old father in love with Zenna.

Today, though, Leye was only half teasing Deet. There were times when he needed her to confirm him, to uphold him. As often as not she contradicted him instead. Sometimes this led him to rethink his position and emerge with a better understanding—thesis, antithesis, synthesis, the dialectic of marriage, the result of being espoused to one's intellectual equal. But sometimes her challenge was painful, unsatisfying, infuriating.

Oblivious to his underlying anger, she went on. "Hari assumed that you would take his form letter for what it is—a definite, final no. He isn't hedging, he's not engaging in some bureaucratic deviousness, he isn't playing politics with you. He isn't stringing you along in hopes of getting more financial support from you—if that were it you know he'd simply ask."

"I already know what he *isn't* doing."

“What he *is* doing is turning you down with finality. An answer from which there is no appeal. He gave you credit for having the wit to understand that.”

“How convenient for you if I believe that.”

Now, at last, she realized he was angry. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You can stay here on Trantor and continue your work with all your bureaucratic friends.”

Her face went cold and hard. “I told you. I am quite happy to go to Terminus with you.”

“Am I supposed to believe that, even now? Your research in community formation within the Imperial bureaucracy cannot possibly continue on Terminus.”

“I’ve already done the most important research. What I’m doing with the Imperial Library staff is a test.”

“Not even a scientific one, since there’s no control group.”

She looked annoyed. “I’m the one who told *you* that.”

It was true. Leyel had never even heard of control groups until she taught him the whole concept of experimentation. She had found it in some very old child-development studies from the 3100s G.E. “Yes, I was just agreeing with you,” he said lamely.

“The point is, I can write my book as well on Terminus as anywhere else. And yes, Leyel, you *are* supposed to believe that I’m happy to go with you, because I said it, and therefore it’s so.”

“I believe that you believe it. I also believe that in your heart you are very glad that I was turned down, and you don’t want me to pursue this matter any further so there’ll be no chance of your having to go to the godforsaken end of the universe.”

Those had been her words, months ago, when he first proposed applying to join the Seldon Foundation. “We’d have to go to the godforsaken end of the universe!” She remembered now as well as he did. “You ‘ll hold that against me forever, won’t you! I think I deserve to be forgiven my first reaction. I did consent to go, didn’t I?”

“Consent, yes. But you never wanted to.”

“Well, Leyel, that’s true enough. I never *wanted* to. Is that your idea of what our marriage means? That I’m to subsume myself in you so deeply that even your desires become my own? I thought it was enough that from time to time we consent to sacrifice for each other. I never expected you to *want* to leave the Forska estates and come to Trantor when I needed to do my research here. I only asked you to *do* it—whether you wanted to or not—because *I* wanted it. I recognized and respected your sacrifice. I am very angry to discover that *my* sacrifice is despised.”

“*Your* sacrifice remains unmade. We are still on Trantor.”

“Then by all means, go to Hari Seldon, plead with him, humiliate yourself, and then realize that what I told you is true. He doesn’t want you to join his Foundation and he will not allow you to go to Terminus.”

“Are you so certain of that?”

“No, I’m not *certain*. It merely seems likely.”

“I *will* go to Terminus, if he’ll have me. I hope I don’t have to go alone.”

He regretted the words as soon as he said them. She froze as if she had been slapped, a look of horror on her face. Then she turned and ran from the room. A few moments later, he heard the chime announcing that the door of their apartment had opened. She was gone.

No doubt to talk things over with one of her friends. Women have no sense of discretion. They cannot keep domestic squabbles to themselves. She will tell them all the awful things I said, and they’ll cluck and tell her it’s what she must expect from a husband, husbands demand that their wives make all the sacrifices, you poor thing, poor poor Deet. Well, Leyel didn’t begrudge her this barnyard of sympathetic hens. It was part of human nature, he knew, for women to form a perpetual conspiracy against the men in their lives. That was why women have always been so certain that men also formed a conspiracy against *them*.

How ironic, he thought. Men have no such solace. Men do not bind themselves so easily into communities. A man is always aware of the possibility of betrayal, of conflicting loyalties. Therefore when a man *does* commit himself truly, it is a rare and sacred bond, not to be cheapened by discussing it with others. Even a marriage, even a *good* marriage like theirs—*his* commitment might be absolute, but he could never trust hers so completely.

Leyel had buried himself within the marriage, helping and serving and loving Deet with all his heart. She was wrong, completely wrong about his coming to Trantor. He hadn't come as a sacrifice, against his will, solely because she wanted to come. On the contrary: because she wanted so much to come, he *also* wanted to come, changing even his desires to coincide with hers. She commanded his very heart, because it was impossible for him not to desire anything that would bring her happiness.

But she, no, she could not do that for him. If *she* went to Terminus, it would be as a noble sacrifice. She would never let him forget that she hadn't wanted to. To him, their marriage was his very soul. To Deet, their marriage was just a friendship with sex. Her soul belonged as much to these other women as to him. By dividing her loyalties, she fragmented them; none were strong enough to sway her deepest desires. Thus he discovered what he supposed all faithful men eventually discover—that no human relationship is ever anything but tentative. There is no such thing as an unbreakable bond between people. Like the particles in the nucleus of the atom. They are bound by the strongest forces in the universe, and yet they can be shattered, they can break.

Nothing can last. Nothing is, finally, what it once seemed to be. Deet and he had had a perfect marriage until there came a stress that exposed its imperfection. Anyone who thinks he has a perfect marriage, a perfect friendship, a perfect trust of any kind, he only believes this because the stress that will break it has not yet come. He might die with the illusion of happiness, but all he has proven is that sometimes death comes before betrayal. If you live long enough, betrayal will inevitably come.

Such were the dark thoughts that filled Leyel's mind as he made his way through the maze of the city of Trantor. Leyel did not seal himself inside a private car when he went about in the planet-wide city. He refused the trappings of wealth; he insisted on experiencing the life of Trantor as an ordinary man. Thus his bodyguards were under strict instructions to remain discreet, interfering with no pedestrians except those carrying weapons, as revealed by a subtle and instantaneous scan.

It was much more expensive to travel through the city this way, of course—every time he stepped out the door of his simple apartment, nearly a hundred high-paid bribeproof employees went into action. A weaponproof car would have been much cheaper. But Leyel was determined not to be imprisoned by his wealth.

So he walked through the corridors of the city, riding cabs and tubes, standing in lines like anyone else. He felt the great city throbbing with life around him. Yet such was his dark and melancholy mood today that the very life of the city filled him with a sense of betrayal and loss. Even you, great Trantor, the Imperial City, even you will be betrayed by the people who made you. Your empire will desert you, and you will become a pathetic remnant of yourself, plated with the metal of a thousand worlds and asteroids as a reminder that once the whole galaxy promised to serve you forever, and now you are abandoned. Hari Seldon had seen it. Hari Seldon understood the changeability of humankind. He knew that the great empire would fall, and so—unlike the government, which depended on things remaining the same forever—Hari Seldon could actually take steps to ameliorate the Empire's fall, to prepare on Terminus a womb for the rebirth of human greatness. Hari was creating the future. It was unthinkable that he could mean to cut Leyel Forska out of it.

The Foundation, now that it had legal existence and Imperial funding, had quickly grown into a busy complex of offices in the four-thousand-year-old Putassuran Building. Because the Putassuran was originally built to house the Admiralty shortly after the great victory whose name it bore, it had an air of triumph, of monumental optimism about it—rows of soaring arches, a vaulted atrium with floating bubbles of light rising and dancing in channeled columns of air. In recent centuries the building had served as a site for informal public concerts and lectures, with the offices used to house the Museum Authority. It had come empty only a year before Hari Seldon was granted the right to form his Foundation, but it seemed

as though it had been built for this very purpose. Everyone was hurrying this way and that, always seeming to be on urgent business, and yet also happy to be part of a noble cause. There had been no noble causes in the Empire for a long, long time.

Leyel quickly threaded his way through the maze that protected the Foundation's director from casual interruption. Other men and women, no doubt, had tried to see Hari Seldon and failed, put off by this functionary or that. Hari Seldon is a very busy man. Perhaps if you make an appointment for later. Seeing him today is out of the question. He's in meetings all afternoon and evening. Do call before coming next time.

But none of this happened to Leyel Forska. All he had to do was say, "Tell Mr. Seldon that Mr. Forska wishes to continue a conversation." However much awe they might have of Hari Seldon, however they might intend to obey his orders not to be disturbed, they all knew that Leyel Forska was the universal exception. Even Linge Chen would be called out of a meeting of the Commission of Public Safety to speak with Forska, especially if Leyel went to the trouble of coming in person.

The ease with which he gained entry to see Hari, the excitement and optimism of the people, of the building itself, had encouraged Leyel so much that he was not at all prepared for Hari's first words.

"Leyel, I'm surprised to see you. I thought you would understand that my message was final."

It was the worst thing that Hari could possibly have said. Had Deet been right after all? Leyel studied Hari's face for a moment, trying to see some sign of change. Was all that had passed between them through the years forgotten now? Had Hari's friendship never been real? No. Looking at Hari's face, a bit more lined and wrinkled now, Leyel saw still the same earnestness, the same plain honesty that had always been there. So instead of expressing the rage and disappointment that he felt, Leyel answered carefully, leaving the way open for Hari to change his mind. "I understood that your message was deceptive, and therefore could not be final."

Hari looked a little angry. "Deceptive?"

"I know which men and women you've been taking into your Foundation. They are not second-raters."

"Compared to you they are," said Hari. "They're academics, which means they're clerks. Sorters and interpreters of information."

"So am I. So are all scholars today. Even *your* inestimable theories arose from sorting through a trillion trillion bytes of data and interpreting it."

Hari shook his head. "I didn't just sort through data. I had an idea in my head. So did you. Few others do. You and I are expanding human knowledge. Most of the rest are only digging it up in one place and piling it in another. That's what the *Encyclopedia Galactica* is. A new pile."

"Nevertheless, Hari, you know and I know that this is not the real reason you turned me down. And don't tell me that it's because Leyel Forska's presence on Terminus would call undue attention to the project. You already have so much attention from the government that you can hardly breathe."

"You are unpleasantly persistent, Leyel. I don't like even having this conversation."

"That's too bad, Hari. I want to be part of your project. I would contribute to it more than any other person who might join it. I'm the one who plunged back into the oldest and most valuable archives and exposed the shameful amount of data loss that had arisen from neglect. I'm the one who launched the computerized extrapolation of shattered documents that your *Encyclopedia*—"

"Absolutely depends on. Our work would be impossible without your accomplishments."

"And yet you turned me down, and with a crudely flattering note."

"I didn't mean to give offense, Leyel."

"You also didn't mean to tell the truth. But you *will* tell me, Hari, or I'll simply go to Terminus anyway."

"The Commission of Public Safety has given my Foundation absolute control over who may or may not come to Terminus."

"Hari. You know perfectly well that all I have to do is hint to some lower-level functionary that I

want to go to Terminus. Chen will hear of it within minutes, and within an hour he'll grant me an exception to your charter. If I did that, and if you fought it, you'd lose your charter. You *know* that. If you want me not to go to Terminus, it isn't enough to forbid me; You must persuade me that I ought not to be there."

Hari closed his eyes and sighed. "I don't think you're willing to be persuaded, Leye. Go if you must. "

For a moment Leye wondered if Hari was giving in. But no, that was impossible, not so easily. "Oh, yes, Hari, but then I'd find myself cut off from everybody else on Terminus except my own serving people. Fobbed off with useless assignments. Cut out of the real meetings. "

"That goes without saying," said Hari. "You are not part of the Foundation, you will not be, you cannot be. And if you try to use your wealth and influence to force your way in, you will succeed only in annoying the Foundation, not in joining it. Do you understand me?"

Only too well, thought Leye in shame. Leye knew perfectly well the limitations of power, and it was beneath him to have tried to bluster his way into getting something that could only be given freely. "Forgive me, Hari. I wouldn't have tried to force you. You know I don't do that sort of thing. "

"I know you've never done it since we've been friends, Leye. I was afraid that I was teaming something new about you." Hari sighed. He turned away for a long moment, then turned back with a different look on his face, a different kind of energy in his voice. Leye knew that look, that vigor. It meant Hari was taking him more deeply into his confidence. "Leye, you have to understand, I'm not just creating an encyclopedia on Terminus."

Immediately Leye grew worried. It had taken a great deal of Leye's influence to persuade the government not to have Hari Seldon summarily exiled when he first started disseminating copies of his treatises about the impending fall of the Empire. They were sure Seldon was plotting treason, and had even put him on trial, where Seldon finally persuaded them that all he wanted to do was create the Encyclopedia Galactica, the repository of all the wisdom of the Empire. Even now, if Seldon confessed some ulterior motive, the government would move against him. It was to be assumed that the Pubs—Public Safety Office—were recording this entire conversation. Even Leye's influence couldn't stop them if they had a confession from Hari's own mouth.

"No, Leye, don't be nervous. My meaning is plain enough. For the Encyclopedia Galactica to succeed, I have to create a thriving city of scholars on Terminus. A colony full of men and women with fragile egos and unstemmable ambition, all of them trained in vicious political infighting at the most dangerous and terrible schools of bureaucratic combat in the Empire—the universities. "

"Are you actually telling me you won't let me join your Foundation because I never attended one of those pathetic universities? My self-education is worth ten times their lockstep force-fed pseudolearning."

"Don't make your antiuniversity speech to me, Leye. I'm saying that one of my most important concerns in staffing the Foundation is compatibility. I won't bring anyone to Terminus unless I believe he—or *she*—would be happy there."

The emphasis Hari put on the word *she* suddenly made everything clearer. "This isn't about me at all, is it?" Leye said. "It's about Deet."

Hari said nothing.

"You know she doesn't want to go. You know she prefers to remain on Trantor. And that's why you aren't taking me! Is that it?"

Reluctantly, Hari conceded the point. "It does have something to do with Deet, yes. "

"Don't you know how much the Foundation means to me?" demanded Leye. "Don't you know how much I'd give up to be part of your work?"

Hari sat there in silence for a moment. Then he murmured, "Even Deet?"

Leye almost blurted out an answer. Yes, of course, even Deet, anything for this great work.

But Hari's measured gaze stopped him. One thing Leye had known since they first met at a conference back in their youth was that Hari would not stand for another man's self-deception. They had sat next to each other at a presentation by a demographer who had a considerable reputation at the time.

Leyel watched as Hari destroyed the poor man's thesis with a few well-aimed questions. The demographer was furious. Obviously he had not seen the flaws in his own argument—but now that they had been shown to him, he refused to admit that they were flaws at all.

Afterward, Hari had said to Leyel, "I've done him a favor."

"How, by giving him someone to hate?" said Leyel.

"No. Before, he believed his own unwarranted conclusions. He had deceived himself. Now he doesn't believe them."

"But he still propounds them."

"So—now he's more of a liar and less of a fool. I have improved his private integrity. His public morality I leave up to him. "

Leyel remembered this and knew that if he told Hari he could give up Deet for any reason, even to join the Foundation, it would be worse than a lie. It would be foolishness.

"It's a terrible thing you've done," said Leyel. "You know that Deet is part of myself. I can't give her up to join your Foundation. But now for the rest of our lives together I'll know that I could have gone, if not for her. You've given me wormwood and gall to drink, Hari."

Hari nodded slowly. "I hoped that when you read my note you'd realize I didn't want to tell you more. I hoped you wouldn't come to me and ask. I can't lie to you, Leyel. I wouldn't if I could. But I did withhold information, as much as possible. To spare us both problems. "

"It didn't work."

"It isn't Deet's fault, Leyel. It's who she is. She belongs on Trantor, not on Terminus. And you belong with her. It's a fact, not a decision. We'll never discuss this again."

"No," said Leyel.

They sat there for a long minute, gazing steadily at each other. Leyel wondered if he and Hari would ever speak again. No. Never again. I don't ever want to see you again, Hari Seldon. You've made me regret the one unregrettable decision of my life—Deet. You've made me wish, somewhere in my heart, that I'd never married her. Which is like making me wish I'd never been born.

Leyel got up from his chair and left the room without a word. When he got outside, he turned to the reception room in general, where several people were waiting to see Seldon. "Which of you are mine?" he asked.

Two women and one man stood up immediately.

"Fetch me a secure car and a driver."

Without a glance at each other, one of them left on the errand. The others fell in step beside Leyel. Subtlety and discretion were over for the moment. Leyel had no wish to mingle with the people of Trantor now. He only wanted to go home.

Hari Seldon left his office by the back way and soon found his way to Chandrakar Matt's cubicle in the Department of Library Relations. Chanda looked up and waved, then effortlessly slid her chair back until it was in the exact position required. Hari picked up a chair from the neighboring cubicle and, again without showing any particular care, set it exactly where it had to be.

Immediately the computer installed inside Chanda's lector recognized the configuration. It recorded Hari's costume of the day from three angles and superimposed the information on a long-stored holoimage of Chanda and Hari conversing pleasantly. Then, once Hari was seated, it began displaying the hologram. The hologram exactly matched the positions of the real Hari and Chanda, so that infrared sensors would show no discrepancy between image and fact. The only thing different was the faces—the movement of lips, blinking of eyes, the expressions. Instead of matching the words Hari and Chanda were actually saying, they matched the words being pushed into the air outside the cubicle—a harmless, randomly chosen series of remarks that took into account recent events so that no one would suspect that it was a canned conversation.

It was one of Hari's few opportunities for candid conversation that the Pubs would not overhear, and he and Chanda protected it carefully. They never spoke long enough or often enough that the Pubs

would wonder at their devotion to such empty conversations. Much of their communication was subliminal—a sentence would stand for a paragraph, a word for a sentence, a gesture for a word. But when the conversation was done, Chanda knew where to go from there, what to do next; and Hari was reassured that his most important work was going on behind the smokescreen of the Foundation.

“For a moment I thought he might actually leave her.”

“Don’t underestimate the lure of the Encyclopedia.”

“I fear I’ve wrought too well, Chanda. Do you think someday the Encyclopedia Galactica might actually exist?”

“It’s a good idea. Good people are inspired by it. It wouldn’t serve its purpose if they weren’t. What should I tell Deet?”

“Nothing, Chanda. The fact that Leyel is staying, that’s enough for her.”

“If he changes his mind, will you actually let him go to Terminus?”

“If he changes his mind, then he *must* go, because if he would leave Deet, he’s not the man for us.”

“Why not just tell him? Invite him?”

“He must become part of the Second Foundation without realizing it. He must do it by natural inclination, not by a summons from me, and above all not by his own ambition.”

“Your standards are so high, Hari, it’s no wonder so few measure up. Most people in the Second Foundation don’t even know that’s what it is. They think they’re librarians. Bureaucrats. They think Deet is an anthropologist who works among them in order to study them.”

“Not so. They once thought that, but now they think of Deet as one of them. As one of the *best* of them. She’s defining what it means to be a librarian. She’s making them proud of the name.”

“Aren’t you ever troubled, Hari, by the fact that in the practice of your art—”

“My *science*.”

“Your meddling magical *craft*, you old wizard, you don’t fool *me* with all your talk of science. I’ve seen the scripts of the holographs you’re preparing for the vault on Terminus.”

“*That’s all a pose.*”

“I can just imagine you saying those words. Looking perfectly satisfied with yourself. ‘If you care to smoke, I wouldn’t mind...Pause for chuckle...Why should I? I’m not really here.’ Pure showmanship.”

Hari waved off the idea. The computer quickly found a bit of dialogue to fit his gesture, so the false scene would not seem false. “No, I’m *not* troubled by the fact that in the practice of my *science* I change the lives of human beings. Knowledge has always changed people’s lives. The only difference is that I *know* I’m changing them and the changes I introduce are planned, they’re under control. Did the man who invented the first artificial light—what was it, animal fat with a wick? A light-emitting diode?—did he realize what it would do to humankind, to be given power over night?”

As always, Chanda deflated him the moment he started congratulating himself. “In the first place, it was almost certainly a woman, and in the second place, she knew exactly what she was doing. It allowed her to find her way through the house at night. Now she could put her nursing baby in another bed, in another room, so she could get some sleep at night without fear of rolling over and smothering the child.”

Hari smiled. “If artificial light was invented by a woman, it was certainly a prostitute, to extend her hours of work. “

Chanda grinned. He did not laugh—it was too hard for the computer to come up with jokes to explain laughter. “We’ll watch Leyel carefully, Hari. How will we know when he’s ready, so we can begin to count on him for protection and leadership?”

“When you already count on him, then he’s ready. When his commitment and loyalty are firm, when the goals of the Second Foundation are already in his heart, when he acts them out in his life, then he’s ready.”

There was a finality in Hari’s tone. The conversation was nearly over.

“By the way, Hari, you were right. No one has even questioned the omission of any important

psychohistorical data from the Foundation library on Terminus.”

“Of course not. Academics never look outside their own discipline. That’s another reason why I’m glad Leyel isn’t going. *He* would notice that the only psychologist we’re sending is Bor Alurin. Then I’d have to explain more to him than I want. Give my love to Deet, Chanda. Tell her that her test case is going very well. She’ll end up with a husband *and* a community of scientists of the mind.”

“Artists. Wizards. Demigods.”

“Stubborn misguided women who don’t know science when they’re doing it. All in the Imperial Library. Till next time, Chanda.”

If Deet had asked him about his interview with Hari, if she had commiserated with him about Hari’s refusal, his resentment of her might have been uncontainable, he might have lashed out at her and said something that could never be forgiven. Instead, she was perfectly herself, so excited about her work and so beautiful, even with her face showing all the sag and wrinkling of her sixty years, that all Leyel could do was fall in love with her again, as he had so many times in their years together.

“It’s working beyond anything I hoped for, Leyel. I’m beginning to hear stories that I created months and years ago, coming back as epic legends. You remember the time I retrieved and extrapolated the accounts of the uprising at Misercordia only three days before the Admiralty needed them?”

“Your finest hour. Admiral Divart still talks about how they used the old battle plots as a strategic guideline and put down the Tellekers’ strike in a single three-day operation without loss of a ship.”

“You have a mind like a trap, even if you *are* old.”

“Sadly, all I can remember is the past.”

“Dunce, that’s all *anyone* can remember.”

He prompted her to go on with her account of today’s triumph. “It’s an epic legend now?”

“It came back to me without my name on it, and bigger than life. As a reference. Rinjy was talking with some young librarians from one of the inner provinces who were on the standard interlibrary tour, and one of them said something about how you could stay in the Imperial Library on Trantor all your life and never see the real world at all.”

Leyel hooted. “Just the thing to say to Rinjy!”

“Exactly. Got her dander up, of course, but the important thing is, she immediately told them the story of how a librarian, *all on her own*, saw the similarity between the Misercordia uprising and the Tellekers’ strike. She knew no one at the Admiralty would listen to her unless she brought them all the information at once. So she delved back into the ancient records and found them in deplorable shape—the original data had been stored in glass, but that was forty-two centuries ago, and no one had refreshed the data. None of the secondary sources actually showed the battle plots or ship courses—Misercordia had mostly been written about by biographers, not military historians—”

“Of course. It was Pol Yuensau’s first battle, but he was just a pilot, not a commander—”

“I know *you* remember, my intrusive pet. The point is what Rinjy *said* about this mythical librarian.”

“You. “

“I was standing right there. I don’t think Rinjy knew it was me, or she would have said something—she wasn’t even in the same division with me then, you know. What matters is that Rinjy heard a version of the story and by the time she told it, it was transformed into a magic hero tale. The prophetic librarian of Trantor. “

“What does *that* prove? You *are* a magic hero. “

“The way she told it, I did it all on my own initiative”

“You did. You were assigned to do document extrapolation, and you just happened to start with Misercordia.”

“But in Rinjy’s version, I had *already* seen its usefulness with the Tellekers’ strike. She said the librarian sent it to the Admiralty and only then did they realize it was the key to bloodless victory.”

“Librarian saves the Empire.”

“Exactly.”

“But you did.”

“But I didn’t *mean* to. And Admiralty requested the information—the only really extraordinary thing was that I had already finished two weeks of document restoration—”

“Which you did brilliantly.”

“Using programs you had helped design, thank you very much, O Wise One, as you indirectly praise yourself. It was sheer coincidence that I could give them exactly what they wanted within five minutes of their asking. But now it’s a hero story within the community of librarians. In the Imperial Library itself, and now spreading outward to all the other libraries.”

“This is so anecdotal, Deet. I don’t see how you can publish this.”

“Oh, I don’t intend to. Except perhaps in the introduction. What matters to me is that it proves my theory. “

“It has no statistical validity.”

“It proves it to *me*. I know that my theories of community formation are true. That the vigor of a community depends on the allegiance of its members, and the allegiance can be created and enhanced by the dissemination of epic stories.”

“She speaks the language of academia. I should be writing this down, so you don’t have to think up all those words again.”

“Stories that make the community seem more important, more central to human life. Because Rinjy could tell this story, it made her more proud to be a librarian, which increased her allegiance to the community and gave the community more power within her.”

“You are possessing their souls.”

“And they’ve got mine. Together our souls are possessing each other.”

There was the rub. Deet’s role in the library had begun as applied research—joining the library staff in order to confirm her theory of community formation. But that task was impossible to accomplish without in fact becoming a committed part of the library community. It was Deet’s dedication to serious science that had brought them together. Now that very dedication was stealing her away. It would hurt her more to leave the library than it would to lose Leye.

Not true. Not true at all, he told himself sternly. self-pity leads to self-deception. Exactly the opposite is true—it would hurt her more to lose Leye than to leave her community of librarians. That’s why she consented to go to Terminus in the first place. But could he blame her for being glad that she didn’t have to choose? Glad that she could have both?

Yet even as he beat down the worst of the thoughts arising from his disappointment, he couldn’t keep some of the nastiness from coming out in his conversation. “How will you know when your experiment is over?”

She frowned. “It’ll never be *over*, Leye. They’re all really librarians—I don’t pick them up by the tails like mice and put them back in their cages when the experiment’s done. At some point I’ll simply stop, that’s all, and write my book.”

“Will you?”

“Write the book? I’ve written books before, I think I can do it again. “

“I meant, will you stop?”

“When, now? Is this some test of my love for you, Leye? Are you jealous of my friendships with Rinjy and Animet and Fin and Urik?”

No! Don’t accuse me of such childish, selfish feelings!

But before he could snap back his denial, he knew that his denial would be false.

“Sometimes I am, yes, Deet. Sometimes I think you’re happier with them.”

And because he had spoken honestly, what could have become a bitter quarrel remained a

conversation. “But I *am*, Leyel,” she answered, just as frankly. “It’s because when I’m with them, I’m creating something new, I’m creating something *with them*. It’s exciting, invigorating, I’m discovering new things every day, in every word they say, every smile, every tear someone sheds, every sign that being one of *us* is the most important thing in their lives.”

“I can’t compete with that.”

“No, you can’t, Leyel. But you complete it. Because it would all mean nothing, it would be more frustrating than exhilarating if I couldn’t come back to you every day and tell you what happened. You always understand what it means, you’re always excited for me, you validate my experience. “

“I’m your audience. Like a parent.”

“Yes, old man. Like a husband. Like a child. Like the person I love most in all the world. You are my root. I make a brave show out there, all branches and bright leaves in the sunlight, but I come here to suck the water of life from your soil.”

“Leyel Forska, the font of capillarity. You are the tree, and I am the dirt.”

“Which happens to be full of fertilizer.” She kissed him. A kiss reminiscent of younger days. An invitation, which he gladly accepted.

A softened section of floor served them as an impromptu bed. At the end, he lay beside her, his arm across her waist, his head on her shoulder, his lips brushing the skin of her breast. He remembered when her breasts were small and firm, perched on her chest like small monuments to her potential. Now when she lay on her back they were a ruin, eroded by age so they flowed off her chest to either side, resting wearily on her arms.

“You are a magnificent woman,” he whispered, his lips tickling her skin.

Their slack and flabby bodies were now capable of greater passion than when they were taut and strong. Before, they were all potential. That’s what we love in youthful bodies, the teasing potential. Now hers is a body of accomplishment. Three fine children were the blossoms, then the fruit of this tree, gone off and taken root somewhere else. The tension of youth could now give way to a relaxation of the flesh. There were no more promises in their lovemaking. Only fulfillment.

She murmured softly in his ear, “That was a ritual, by the way. Community maintenance.”

“So I’m just another experiment?”

“A fairly successful one. I’m testing to see if this little community can last until one of us drops. “

“What if you drop first? Who’ll write the paper then?”

“You will. But you’ll sign my name to it. I want the Imperial medal for it. Posthumously. Glue it to my memorial stone. “

“I’ll wear it myself. If you’re selfish enough to leave all the real work to me, you don’t deserve anything better than a cheap replica.”

She slapped his back. “You are a nasty selfish old man, then. The real thing or nothing.”

He felt the sting of her slap as if he deserved it. A nasty selfish old man. If she only knew how right she was. There had been a moment in Hari’s office when he’d almost said the words that would deny all that there was between them. The words that would cut her out of his life. Go to Terminus without her! I would be more myself if they took my heart, my liver, my brain.

How could I have thought I wanted to go to Terminus, anyway? To be surrounded by academics of the sort I most despise, struggling with them to get the encyclopedia properly designed. They’d each fight for their petty little province, never catching the vision of the whole, never understanding that the encyclopedia would be valueless if it were compartmentalized. It would be a life in hell, and in the end he’d lose, because the academic mind was incapable of growth or change.

It was here on Trantor that he could still accomplish something. Perhaps even solve the question of human origin, at least to his own satisfaction—and perhaps he could do it soon enough that he could get his discovery included in the Encyclopedia Galactica before the Empire began to break down at the edges, cutting Terminus off from the rest of the Galaxy.

It was like a shock of static electricity passing through his brain; he even saw an afterglow of light around the edges of his vision, as if a spark had jumped some synaptic gap.

“What a sham,” he said.

“Who, you? Me?”

“Hari Seldon. All this talk about his Foundation to create the Encyclopedia Galactica.”

“Careful, Lylel.” It was almost impossible that the Pubs could have found a way to listen to what went on in Lylel Forska’s own apartments. Almost.

“He told me twenty years ago. It was one of his first psychohistorical projections. The Empire will crumble at the edges first. He projected it would happen within the next generation. The figures were crude then. He must have it down to the year now. Maybe even the month. Of course he put his Foundation on Terminus. A place so remote that when the edges of the Empire fray, it will be among the first threads lost. Cut off from Trantor. Forgotten at once!”

“What good would *that* do, Lylel? They’d never hear of any new discoveries then.”

“What you said about us. A tree. Our children like the fruit of that tree.”

“I never said that.”

“I thought it, then. He is dropping his Foundation out on Terminus like the fruit of Empire. To grow into a new Empire by and by.”

“You frighten me, Lylel. If the Pubs ever heard you say that—”

“That crafty old fox. That sly, deceptive—he never actually lied to me, but of course he couldn’t send me there. If the Forska fortune was tied up with Terminus, the Empire would never lose track of the place. The edges might fray elsewhere, but never there. Putting me on Terminus would be the undoing of the *real* project.” It was such a relief. Of course Hari couldn’t tell him, not with the Pubs listening, but it had nothing to do with him or Deet. It wouldn’t have to be a barrier between them after all. It was just one of the penalties of being the keeper of the Forska fortune.

“Do you really think so?” asked Deet.

“I was a fool not to see it before. But Hari was a fool too if he thought I wouldn’t guess it.”

“Maybe he expects you to guess everything.”

“Oh, nobody could ever come up with *everything* Hari’s doing. He has more twists and turns in his brain than a hyperpath through core space. No matter how you labor to pick your way through, you’ll always find Hari at the end of it, nodding happily and congratulating you on coming this far. He’s ahead of us all. He’s already planned everything, and the rest of us are doomed to follow in his footsteps.”

“Is it doom?”

“Once I thought Hari Seldon was God. Now I know he’s much less powerful than that. He’s merely Fate.”

“No, Lylel. Don’t say that.”

“Not even Fate. Just our guide through it. He sees the future, and points the way.”

“Rubbish.” She slid out from under him, got up, pulled her robe from its hook on the wall. “My old bones get cold when I lie about naked.”

Lylel’s legs were trembling, but not with cold. “The future is his, and the present is yours, but the past belongs to me. I don’t know how far into the future his probability curves have taken him, but I can match him, step for step, century for century into the past.”

“Don’t tell me you’re going to solve the question of origin. You’re the one who proved it wasn’t worth solving.”

“I proved that it wasn’t important or even possible to find the planet of origin. But I also said that we could still discover the natural laws that accounted for the origin of man. Whatever forces created us as human beings must still be present in the universe.”

“I did read what you wrote, you know. You said it would be the labor of the next millennium to find the answer.”

“Just now. Lying here, just now, I saw it, just out of reach. Something about your work and Hari’s work, and the tree.”

“The tree was about me needing you, Leyel. It wasn’t about the origin of humanity. “

“It’s gone. Whatever I saw for a moment there, it’s gone. But I can find it again. It’s there in your work, and Hari’s Foundation, and the fall of the Empire, and the damned pear tree. “

“I never said it was a pear tree. “

“I used to play in the pear orchard on the grounds of the estate in Holdwater. To me the word ‘tree’ always means a pear tree. One of the deep-worn ruts in my brain.”

“I’m relieved. I was afraid you were reminded of pears by the shape of these ancient breasts when I bend over. “

“Open your robe again. Let me see if I think of pears. “

Leyel paid for Hari Seldon’s funeral. It was not lavish. Leyel had meant it to be. The moment he heard of Hari’s death—not a surprise, since Hari’s first brutal stroke had left him half-paralyzed in a wheelchair—he set his staff to work on a memorial service appropriate to honor the greatest scientific mind of the millennium. But word arrived, in the form of a visit from Commissioner Rom Divart, that any sort of public services would be...

“Shall we say, inappropriate?”

“The man was the greatest genius I’ve ever heard of! He virtually invented a branch of science that clarified things that—he made a science out of the sort of thing that soothsayers and—and—*economists* used to do!”

Rom laughed at Leyel’s little joke, of course, because he and Leyel had been friends forever. Rom was the only friend of Leyel’s childhood who had never sucked up to him or resented him or stayed cool toward him because of the Forska fortune. This was, of course, because the Divart holdings were, if anything, slightly greater. They had played together unencumbered by strangeness or jealousy or awe.

They even shared a tutor for two terrible, glorious years, from the time Rom’s father was murdered until the execution of Rom’s grandfather, which caused so much outrage among the nobility that the mad Emperor was stripped of power and the Imperium put under the control of the Commission of Public Safety. Then, as the youthful head of one of the great families, Rom had embarked on his long and fruitful career in politics.

Rom said later that for those two years it was Leyel who taught him that there was still some good in the world; that Leyel’s friendship was the only reason Rom hadn’t killed himself. Leyel always thought this was pure theatrics. Rom was a born actor. That’s why he so excelled at making stunning entrances and playing unforgettable scenes on the grandest stage of all—the politics of the Imperium. Someday he would no doubt exit as dramatically as his father and grandfather had.

But he was not all show. Rom never forgot the friend of his childhood. Leyel knew it, and knew also that Rom’s coming to deliver this message from the Commission of Public Safety probably meant that Rom had fought to make the message as mild as it was. So Leyel blustered a bit, then made his little joke. It was his way of surrendering gracefully.

What Leyel didn’t realize, right up until the day of the funeral, was exactly *how* dangerous his friendship with Hari Seldon had been, and how stupid it was for him to associate himself with Hari’s name now that the old man was dead. Linge Chen, the Chief Commissioner, had not risen to the position of greatest power in the Empire without being fiercely suspicious of potential rivals and brutally efficient about eliminating them. Hari had maneuvered Chen into a position such that it was more dangerous to kill the old man than to give him his Foundation on Terminus. But now Hari was dead, and apparently Chen was watching to see who mourned.

Leyel did—Leyel and the few members of Hari’s staff who had stayed behind on Trantor to maintain contact with Terminus up to the moment of Hari’s death. Leyel should have known better. Even alive, Hari wouldn’t have cared who came to his funeral. And now, dead, he cared even less. Leyel didn’t believe his friend lived on in some ethereal plane, watching carefully and taking attendance at the

services. No, Leyel simply felt he had to be there, felt he had to speak. Not for Hari, really. For himself. To continue to be himself, Leyel had to make some kind of public gesture toward Hari Seldon and all he had stood for.

Who heard? Not many. Deet, who thought his eulogy was too mild by half. Hari's staff, who were quite aware of the danger and winced at each of Leyel's list of Hari's accomplishments. Naming them—and emphasizing that only Seldon had the vision to do these great works—was inherently a criticism of the level of intelligence and integrity in the Empire. The Pubs were listening, too. They noted that Leyel clearly agreed with Hari Seldon about the certainty of the Empire's fall—that in fact as a galactic empire it had probably already fallen, since its authority was no longer coextensive with the Galaxy.

If almost anyone else had said such things, to such a small audience, it would have been ignored, except to keep him from getting any job requiring a security clearance. But when the head of the Forska family came out openly to affirm the correctness of the views of a man who had been tried before the Commission of Public Safety—that posed a greater danger to the Commission than Hari Seldon.

For, as head of the Forska family, if Leyel Forska wanted, he could be one of the great players on the political stage, could have a seat on the Commission along with Rom Divart and Linge Chen. Of course, that would also have meant constantly watching for assassins—either to avoid them or to hire them—and trying to win the allegiance of various military strongmen in the farflung reaches of the Galaxy. Leyel's grandfather had spent his life in such pursuits, but Leyel's father had declined, and Leyel himself had thoroughly immersed himself in science and never so much as inquired about politics.

Until now. Until he made the profoundly political act of paying for Hari Seldon's funeral and then *speaking* at it. What would he do next? There were a thousand would-be warlords who would spring to revolt if a Forska promised what would-be emperors so desperately needed: a noble sponsor, a mask of legitimacy, and *money*.

Did Linge Chen really believe that Leyel meant to enter politics at his advanced age? Did he really think Leyel posed a threat?

Probably not. If he *had* believed it, he would surely have had Leyel killed, and no doubt all his children as well, leaving only one of his minor grandchildren, whom Chen would carefully control through the guardians he would appoint, thereby acquiring control of the Forska fortune as well as his own.

Instead, Chen only believed that Leyel *might* cause trouble. So he took what were, for him, mild steps.

That was why Rom came to visit Leyel again, a week after the funeral.

Leyel was delighted to see him. "Not on somber business this time, I hope," he said. "But such bad luck—Deet's at the library again, she practically lives there now, but she'd want to—"

"Leyel." Rom touched Leyel's lips with his fingers.

So it *was* somber business after all. Worse than somber. Rom recited what had to be a memorized speech.

"The Commission of Public Safety has become concerned that in your declining years—"

Leyel opened his mouth to protest, but again Rom touched his lips to silence him.

"That in your declining years, the burdens of the Forska estates are distracting you from your exceptionally important scientific work. So great is the Empire's need for the new discoveries and understanding your work will surely bring us, that the Commission of Public Safety has created the office of Forska Trustee to oversee all the Forska estates and holdings. You will, of course, have unlimited access to these funds for your scientific work here on Trantor, and funding will continue for all the archives and libraries you have endowed. Naturally, the Commission has no desire for you to thank us for what is, after all, our duty to one of our noblest citizens, but if your well-known courtesy required you to make a brief public statement of gratitude it would not be inappropriate. "

Leyel was no fool. He knew how things worked. He was being stripped of his fortune and being placed under arrest on Trantor. There was no point in protest or remonstrance, no point even in trying to

make Rom feel guilty for having brought him such a bitter message. Indeed, Rom himself might be in great danger—if Leyel so much as hinted that he expected Rom to come to his support, his dear friend might also fall. So Leyel nodded gravely, and then carefully framed his words of reply.

“Please tell the Commissioners how grateful I am for their concern on my behalf. It has been a long, long time since anyone went to the trouble of easing my burdens. I accept their kind offer. I am especially glad because this means that now I can pursue my studies unencumbered.”

Rom visibly relaxed. Leyel wasn’t going to cause trouble. “My dear friend, I will sleep better knowing that you are always here on Trantor, working freely in the library or taking your leisure in the parks.”

So at least they weren’t going to confine him to his apartment. No doubt they would never let him offplanet, but it wouldn’t hurt to ask. “Perhaps I’ll even have time now to visit my grandchildren now and then.”

“Oh, Leyel, you and I are both too old to enjoy hyperspace any more. Leave that for the youngsters—they can come visit you whenever they want. And sometimes they can stay home, while their parents come to see you.”

Thus Leyel learned that if any of his children came to visit him, *their* children would be held hostage, and vice versa. Leyel himself would never leave Trantor again.

“So much the better,” said Leyel. “I’ll have time to write several books I’ve been meaning to publish.”

“The Empire waits eagerly for every scientific treatise you publish. “ There was a slight emphasis on the word “scientific.” “But I hope you won’t bore us with one of those tedious autobiographies.”

Leyel agreed to the restriction easily enough. “I *promise*, Rom. You know better than anyone else exactly how boring my life has always been.”

“Come now. *My* life’s the boring one, Leyel, all this government claptrap and bureaucratic bushwa. You’ve been at the forefront of scholarship and learning. Indeed, my friend, the Commission hopes you’ll honor us by giving us first look at every word that comes out of your scriptor.”

“Only if you promise to read it carefully and point out any mistakes I might make.” No doubt the Commission intended only to censor his work to remove political material—which Leyel had never included anyway. But Leyel had already resolved never to publish anything again, at least as long as Linge Chen was Chief Commissioner. The safest thing Leyel could do now was to disappear, to let Chen forget him entirely—it would be egregiously stupid to send occasional articles to Chen, thus reminding him that Leyel was still around.

But Rom wasn’t through yet. “I must extend that request to Deet’s work as well. We really want first look at it—do tell her so.”

“Deet?” For the first time Leyel almost let his fury show. Why should Deet be punished because of Leyel’s indiscretion? “Oh, she’ll be too shy for that, Rom—she doesn’t think her work is *important* enough to deserve any attention from men as busy as the Commissioners. They’ll think you only want to see her work because she’s my wife—she’s always annoyed when people patronize her.”

“You must insist, then, Leyel,” said Rom. “I assure you, her studies of the functions of the Imperial bureaucracy have long been interesting to the Commission for their own sake.”

Ah. Of course. Chen would never have allowed a report on the workings of government to appear without making sure it wasn’t dangerous. Censorship of Deet’s writings wouldn’t be Leyel’s fault after all. Or at least not entirely.

“I’ll tell her that, Rom. She’ll be flattered. But won’t you stay and tell her yourself! I can bring you a cup of peshat, we can talk about old times—”

Leyel would have been surprised if Rom had stayed. No, this interview had been at least as hard on Rom as it had been on him. The very fact that Rom had been forced into being the Commission’s messenger to his childhood friend was a humiliating reminder that the Chens were in the ascendant over the Divarts. But as Rom bowed and left, it occurred to Leyel that Chen might have made a mistake.

Humiliating Rom this way, forcing him to place his dearest friend under arrest like this—it might be the straw to break the camel’s back. After all, though no one had ever been able to find out who hired the assassin who killed Rom’s father, and no one had ever learned who denounced Rom’s grandfather, leading to his execution by the paranoid Emperor Wassiniwak, it didn’t take a genius to realize that the House of Chen had profited most from both events.

“I wish I could stay,” said Rom. “But duty calls. Still, you can be sure I’ll think of you often. Of course, I doubt I’ll think of you as you are *now*, you old wreck. I’ll remember you as a boy, when we used to tweak our tutor—remember the time we recoded his lector, so that for a whole week explicit pornography kept coming up on the display whenever the door of his room opened?”

Leyel couldn’t help laughing. “You never forget anything, do you!”

“The poor fool. He never figured out that it was us! Old times. Why couldn’t we have stayed young forever?” He embraced Leyel and then swiftly left.

Linge Chen, you fool, you have reached too far. Your days are numbered. None of the Pubs who were listening in on their conversation could possibly know that Rom and Leyel had never teased their tutor—and that they had never done anything to his lector. It was just Rom’s way of letting Leyel know that they were still allies, still keeping secrets together—and that someone who had authority over both of them was going to be in for a few nasty surprises.

It gave Leyel chills, thinking about what might come of all this. He loved Rom Divart with all his heart, but he also knew that Rom was capable of biding his time and then killing swiftly, efficiently, coldly. Linge Chen had just started his latest six-year term of office, but Leyel knew he’d never finish it. And the next Chief Commissioner would not be a Chen.

Soon, though, the enormity of what had been done to him began to sink in. He had always thought that his fortune meant little to him—that he would be the same man with or without the Forska estates. But now he began to realize that it wasn’t true, that he’d been lying to himself all along. He had known since childhood how despicable rich and powerful men could be—his father had made sure he saw and understood how cruel men became when their money persuaded them they had a right to use others however they wished. So Leyel had learned to despise his own birthright, and, starting with his father, had pretended to others that he could make his way through the world solely by wit and diligence, that he would have been exactly the same man if he had grown up in a common family, with a common education. He had done such a good job of acting as if he didn’t care about his wealth that he came to believe it himself.

Now he realized that Forska estates had been an invisible part of himself all along, as if they were extensions of his body, as if he could flex a muscle and cargo ships would fly, he could blink and mines would be sunk deep into the earth, he could sigh and allover the Galaxy there would be a wind of change that would keep blowing until everything was exactly as he wanted it. Now all those invisible limbs arid senses had been amputated. Now he was crippled—he had only as many arms and legs and eyes as any other human being.

At last he was what he had always pretended to be. An ordinary, powerless man. He hated it.

For the first hours after Rom left, Leyel pretended he could take all this in stride. He sat at the lector and spun through the pages smoothly—without anything on the pages registering in his memory. He kept wishing Deet were there so he could laugh with her about how little this hurt him; then he would be glad that Deet was not there, because one sympathetic touch of her hand would push him over the edge, make it impossible to contain his emotion.

Finally he could not help himself. Thinking of Deet, of their children and grandchildren, of all that had been lost to them because he had made an empty gesture to a dead friend, he threw himself to the softened floor and wept bitterly. Let Chen listen to recordings of what the spy beam shows of this! Let him savor his victory! I’ll destroy him somehow, my staff is still loyal to me, I’ll put together an army, I’ll hire assassins of my own, I’ll make contact with Admiral Sipp, and then Chen will be the one to sob, crying out for mercy as I disfigure him the way he has mutilated me—

Fool.

Leyel rolled over onto his back, dried his face on his sleeve, then lay there, eyes closed, calming himself. No vengeance. No politics. That was Rom's business, not Leyel's. Too late for him to enter the game now—and who would help him, anyway, now that he had already lost his power? There was nothing to be done.

Leyel didn't really want to do anything, anyway. Hadn't they guaranteed that his archives and libraries would continue to be funded? Hadn't they guaranteed him unlimited research funds? And wasn't that all he had cared about anyway? He had long since turned over all the Forska operations to his subordinates—Chen's trustee would simply do the same job. And Leyel's children wouldn't suffer much—he had raised them with the same values that he had grown up with, and so they all pursued careers unrelated to the Forska holdings. They were true children of their father and mother—they wouldn't have any self-respect if they didn't earn their own way in the world. No doubt they'd be disappointed by having their inheritance snatched away. But they wouldn't be destroyed.

I am not ruined. All the lies that Rom told are really true, only they didn't realize it. All that matters in my life, I still have. I really *don't* care about my fortune. It's just the *way* I lost it that made me so furious. I can go on and be the same person I always was. This will even give me an opportunity to see who my true friends are—to see who still honors me for my scientific achievements, and who despises me for my poverty.

By the time Deet got home from the library—late, as was usual these days—Leyel was hard at work, reading back through all the research and speculation on protohuman behavior, trying to see if there was anything other than half-assed guesswork and pompous babble. He was so engrossed in his reading that he spent the first fifteen minutes after she got home telling her of the hilarious stupidities he had found in the day's reading, and then sharing a wonderful, impossible thought he had had.

“What if the human species isn't the only branch to evolve on our family tree? What if there's some other primate species that looks exactly like us, but can't interbreed with us, that functions in a completely different way, and we don't even know it, we all think everybody's just like us, but here and there all over the Empire there are whole towns, cities, maybe even worlds of people who secretly aren't human at all.”

“But Leyel, my overwrought husband, if they look just like us and act just like us, then they *are* human.”

“But they *don't* act exactly like us. There's a difference. A completely different set of rules and assumptions. Only they don't know that we're different, and we don't know that *they're* different. Or even if we suspect it, we're never sure. Just two different species, living side by side and never guessing it.”

She kissed him. “You poor fool, that isn't speculation, it already exists. You have just described the relationship between males and females. Two completely different species, completely unintelligible to each other, living side by side and thinking they're really the same. The fascinating thing, Leyel, is that the two species persist in marrying each other and having babies, sometimes of one species, sometimes of the other, and the whole time they can't understand why they can't understand each other.”

He laughed and embraced her. “You're right, as always, Deet. If I could once understand women, then perhaps I'd know what it is that makes men human.”

“Nothing could possibly make men human,” she answered. “Every time they're just about to get it right, they end up tripping over the damned Y chromosome and turning back into beasts.” She nuzzled his neck.

It was then, with Deet in his arms, that he whispered to her what had happened when Rom visited that day. She said nothing, but held him tightly for the longest time. Then they had a very late supper and went about their nightly routines as if nothing had changed.

Not until they were in bed, not until Deet was softly snoring beside him, did it finally occur to Leyel that Deet was facing a test of her own. Would she still love him, now that he was merely Leyel Forska,

scientist on a pension, and not Lord Forska, master of worlds? Of course she would *intend* to. But just as Leyel had never been aware of how much he depended on his wealth to define himself, so also she might not have realized how much of what she loved about him was his vast power; for even though he didn't flaunt it, it had always been there, like a solid platform underfoot, hardly noticed except now, when it was gone, when their footing was unsure.

Even before this, she had been slipping away into the community of women in the library. She would drift away even faster now, not even noticing it as Leyel became less and less important to her. No need for anything as dramatic as divorce. Just a little gap between them, an empty space that might as well be a chasm, might as well be the abyss. My fortune was a part of me, and now that it's gone, I'm no longer the same man she loved. She won't even know that she doesn't love me any more. She'll just get busier and busier in her work, and in five or ten years when I die of old age, she'll grieve—and then suddenly she'll realize that she isn't half as devastated as she thought she'd be. In fact, she won't be devastated at all. And she'll get on with her life and won't even remember what it was like to be married to me. I'll disappear from all human memory then, except perhaps for a few scientific papers and the libraries.

I'm like the information that was lost in all those neglected archives. Disappearing bit by bit, unnoticed, until all that's left is just a little bit of noise in people's memories. Then, finally, nothing. Blank.

Self-pitying fool. That's what happens to everyone, in the long run. Even Hari Seldon—someday he'll be forgotten, sooner rather than later, if Chen has his way. We all die. We're all lost in the passage of time. The only thing that lives on after us is the new shape we've given to the communities we lived in. There are things that are known because I said them, and even though people have forgotten who said it, they'll go on knowing. Like the story Rinjy was telling—she had forgotten, if she ever knew it, that Deet was the librarian in the original tale. But still she remembered the tale. The community of librarians was different because Deet had been among them. They would be a little different, a little braver, a little stronger, because of Deet. She had left traces of herself in the world.

And then, again, there came that flash of insight, that sudden understanding of the answer to a question that had long been troubling him.

But in the moment that Leyel realized that he held the answer, the answer slipped away. He couldn't remember it. You're asleep, he said silently. You only dreamed that you understood the origin of humanity. That's the way it is in dreams—the truth is always so beautiful, but you can never hold on to it.

“How is he taking it, Deet?”

“Hard to say. Well, I think. He was never much of a wanderer anyway.”

“Come now, it can't be that simple.”

“No. No, it isn't.”

“Tell me.”

“The social things—those were easy. We rarely went anyway, but now people don't invite us. We're politically dangerous. And the few things we had scheduled got canceled or, um, postponed. You know—we'll call you as soon as we have a new date.”

“He doesn't mind this?”

“He *likes* that part. He always hated those things. But they've canceled his speeches. And the lecture series on human ecology.”

“A blow. “

“He pretends not to mind. But he's brooding.”

“Tell me. “

“Works all day, but he doesn't read it to me any more, doesn't make me sit down at the lector the minute I get home. I think he isn't writing anything. “

“Doing nothing?”

“No. Reading. That's all.”

“Maybe he just needs to do research.”

“You don’t know Leyel. He *thinks* by writing. Or talking. He isn’t doing either.”

“Doesn’t talk to you?”

“He answers. I try to talk about things here at the library, his answers are—what? Glum. Sullen.”

“He resents your work?”

“That’s not possible. Leyel has always been as enthusiastic about my work as about his own. And he won’t talk about his own work, either. I ask him, and he says nothing.”

“Not surprising.”

“So it’s all right?”

“No. It’s just not surprising.”

“What is it? Can’t you tell me?”

“What good is telling you? It’s what we call ILS—Identity Loss Syndrome. It’s identical to the passive strategy for dealing with loss of body parts. “

“ILS. What happens in ILS?”

“Deet, come on, you’re a scientist. What do you expect? You’ve just described Leyel’s behavior, I tell you that it’s called ILS, you want to know what ILS is, and what am I going to do?”

“Describe Leyel’s behavior back to me. What an idiot I am.”

“Good, at least you can laugh. “

“Can’t you tell me what to expect?”

“Complete withdrawal from you, from everybody. Eventually he becomes completely antisocial and starts to strike out. Does something self-destructive—like making public statements against Chen, that’d do it.”

“No!”

“Or else he severs his old connections, gets away from you, and reconstructs himself in a different set of communities.”

“This would make him happy?”

“Sure. Useless to the Second Foundation, but happy. It would also turn you into a nasty-tempered old crone, not that you aren’t one already, mind you.”

“Oh, you think Leyel’s the only thing keeping me human?”

“Pretty much, yes. He’s your safety valve.”

“Not lately.”

“I know.”

“Have I been so awful?”

“Nothing that we can’t bear. Deet, if we’re going to be fit to govern the human race someday, shouldn’t we first learn to be good to each other?”

“Well, I’m glad to provide you all with an opportunity to test your patience.”

“You should be glad. We’re doing a fine job so far, wouldn’t you say?”

“Please. You were teasing me about the prognosis, weren’t you?”

“Partly. Everything I said was true, but you know as well as I do that there are as many different ways out of a B-B syndrome as there are people who have them.”

“Behavioral cause, behavioral effect. No *little* hormone shot, then?”

“Deet. He doesn’t know who he is.”

“Can’t I help him?”

“Yes.”

“What? What can I do?”

“This is only a guess, since I haven’t talked to him.”

“Of course.”

“You aren’t home much.”

“I can’t *stand* it there, with him brooding all the time.”

“Fine. Get him out with you.”

“He won’t go.”

“Push him.”

“We barely talk. I don’t know if I even have any leverage over him.”

“Deet. You’re the one who wrote, ‘Communities that make few or no demands on their members cannot command allegiance. All else being equal, members who feel most needed have the strongest allegiance.’ “

“You memorized that?”

“Psychohistory *is* the psychology of populations, but populations can only be quantified as communities. Seldon’s work on statistical probabilities only worked to predict the future within a generation or two until you first published your community theories. That’s because statistics *can’t* deal with cause and effect. Stats tell you what’s happening, never why, never the result. Within a generation or two, the present statistics evaporate, they’re meaningless, you have whole new populations with new configurations. Your community theory gave us a way of predicting which communities would survive, which would grow, which would fade. A way of looking across long stretches of time and space. “

“Hari never told me he was using community theory in any important way. “

“How could he tell you that? He had to walk a tightrope—publishing enough to get psychohistory taken seriously, but not so much that anybody outside the Second Foundation could ever duplicate or continue his work. Your work was a key—but he couldn’t say so.”

“Are you just saying this to make me feel better?”

“Sure. That’s why I’m saying it. But it’s also true—since lying to you wouldn’t make you feel better, would it? Statistics are like taking cross sections of the trunk of a tree. It can tell you a lot about its history. You can figure how healthy it is, how much volume the whole tree has, how much is root and how much is branch. But what it *can’t* tell you is where the tree will branch, and which branches will become major, which minor, and which will rot and fall off and die.”

“But you can’t *quantify* communities, can you? They’re just stories and rituals that bind people together—”

“You’d be surprised what we can quantify. We’re very good at what we do, Deet. Just as you are. Just as Lylel is.”

“Is his work important? After all, human origin is only a historical question. “

“Nonsense, and you know it. Lylel has stripped away the historical issues and he’s searching for the scientific ones. The principles by which human life, as we understand it, is differentiated from nonhuman. If he finds that—don’t you see, Deet? The human race is recreating itself all the time, on every world, in every family, in every individual. We’re born animals, and we teach each other how to be human. Somehow. It matters that we find out how. It matters to psychohistory. It matters to the Second Foundation. It matters to the human race.” “

“So—you aren’t just being kind to Lylel.”

“Yes, we are. You are, too. Good people are kind.”

“Is that all? Lylel is just one man who’s having trouble?”

“We need him. He isn’t important just to you. He’s important to *us*. “

“Oh. Oh.”

“Why are you crying?”

“I was so afraid—that I was being selfish—being so worried about him. Taking up your time like this. “

“Well, if that doesn’t—I thought you were beyond surprising me. “

“Our problems were just—our problems. But now they’re not.”

“Is that so important to you? Tell me, Deet—do you really value this community so much?”

“Yes.”

“More than Leye?”

“No! But enough—that I felt *guilty* for caring so much about him.”

“Go home, Deet. Just go home.”

“What?”

“That’s where you’d rather be. It’s been showing up in your behavior for two months, ever since Hari’s death. You’ve been nasty and snappish, and now I know why. You *resent* us for keeping you away from Leye.”

“No, it was my choice, I—”

“Of course it was your choice! It was your *sacrifice* for the good of the Second Foundation. So now I’m telling you—healing Leye is more important to Hari’s plan than keeping up with your day-to-day responsibilities here.”

“You’re not removing me from my position, are you?”

“No. I’m just telling you to ease up. And get Leye out of the apartment. Do you understand me? Demand it! Reengage him with *you*, or we’ve all lost him.”

“Take him *where*?”

“I don’t know. Theater. Athletic events. Dancing.”

“We don’t *do* those things.”

“Well, what *do* you do?”

“Research. And then talk about it.”

“Fine. Bring him here to the library. Do research with him. Talk about it.”

“But he’ll meet people here. He’d certainly meet *you*.”

“Good. Good. I like that. Yes, let him come here.”

“But I thought we had to keep the Second Foundation a secret from him until he’s ready to take part.”

“I didn’t say you should introduce me as First Speaker.”

“No, no, of course you didn’t. What am I thinking off Of course he can meet you, he can meet everybody. “

“Deet, listen to me.”

“Yes, I’m listening. “

“It’s all right to love him, Deet.”

“I know that.”

“I mean, it’s all right to love him more than you love us. More than you love any of us. More than you love all of us. There you are, crying again.”

“I’m so—”

“Relieved. “

“How do you understand me so well?”

“I only know what you show me and what you tell me. It’s all we ever know about each other. The only thing that helps is that nobody can ever lie for long about who they really are. Not even to themselves.”

For two months Leye followed up on Magolissian’s paper by trying to find some connection between language studies and human origins. Of course this meant weeks of wading through old, useless point-of-origin studies, which kept indicating that Trantor was the focal point of language throughout the history of the Empire, even though *nobody* seriously put forth Trantor as the planet of origin. Once again, though, Leye rejected the search for a particular planet; he wanted to find out regularities, not unique events.

Level hoped for a clue in the fairly recent work—only two thousand years old—of Dagawell Kispitorian. Kispitorian came from the most isolated area of a planet called Artashat, where there were traditions that the original settlers came from an earlier world named Armenia, now uncharted. Kispitorian grew up among mountain people who claimed that long ago, they spoke a completely different language. In fact, the title of Kispitorian's most interesting book was *No Man Understood Us*; many of the folk tales of these people began with the formula "Back in the days when no man understood us..."

Kispitorian had never been able to shake off this tradition of his upbringing, and as he pursued the field of dialect formation and evolution, he kept coming across evidence that at one time the human species spoke not one but many languages. It had always been taken for granted that Galactic Standard was the up-to-date version of the language of the planet of origin—that while a few human groups might have developed dialects, civilization was impossible without mutually intelligible speech. But Kispitorian had begun to suspect that Galactic Standard did not become the universal human language until *after* the formation of the Empire—that, in fact, one of the first labors of the Imperium was to stamp out all other competing languages. The mountain people of Artashat believed that their language had been stolen from them. Kispitorian eventually devoted his life to proving they were right.

He worked first with names, long recognized as the most conservative aspect of language. He found that there were many separate naming traditions, and it was not until about the year 6000 G.E. that all were finally amalgamated into one Empire-wide stream. What was interesting was that the farther back he went, the *more* complexity he found.

Because certain worlds tended to have unified traditions, and so the simplest explanation of this was the one he first put forth—that humans left their home world with a unified language, but the normal forces of language separation caused each new planet to develop its own offshoot, until many dialects became mutually unintelligible. Thus, different languages would not have developed until humanity moved out into space; this was one of the reasons why the Galactic Empire was necessary to restore the primeval unity of the species.

Kispitorian called his first and most influential book *Tower of Confusion*, using the widespread legend of the Tower of Babel as an illustration. He supposed that this story might have originated in that pre-Empire period, probably among the rootless traders roaming from planet to planet, who had to deal on a practical level with the fact that no two worlds spoke the same language. These traders had preserved a tradition that when humanity lived on one planet, they all spoke the same language. They explained the linguistic confusion of their own time by recounting the tale of a great leader who built the first "tower," or starship, to raise mankind up into heaven. According to the story, "God" punished these upstart people by confusing their tongues, which forced them to disperse among the different worlds. The story presented the confusion of tongues as the *cause* of the dispersal instead of its result, but cause-reversal was a commonly recognized feature of myth. Clearly this legend preserved a historical fact.

So far, Kispitorian's work was perfectly acceptable to most scientists. But in his forties he began to go off on wild tangents. Using controversial algorithms—on calculators with a suspiciously high level of processing power—he began to tear apart Galactic Standard itself, showing that many words revealed completely separate phonetic traditions, incompatible with the mainstream of the language. They could not comfortably have evolved within a population that regularly spoke either Standard or its primary ancestor language. Furthermore, there were many words with clearly related meanings that showed they had once diverged according to standard linguistic patterns and then were brought together later, with different meanings or implications. But the time scale implied by the degree of change was far too great to be accounted for in the period between humanity's first settlement of space and the formation of the Empire. Obviously, claimed Kispitorian, there had been many different languages *on the planet of origin*; Galactic Standard was the *first* universal human language. Throughout all human history, separation of language had been a fact of life; only the Empire had had the pervasive power to unify speech.

After that, Kispitorian was written off as a fool, of course—his own Tower of Babble interpretation was now used against him as if an interesting illustration had now become a central argument. He very narrowly escaped execution as a separatist, in fact, since there was an unmistakable tone of regret in his writing about the loss of linguistic diversity. The Imperium did succeed in cutting off all his funding and jailing him for a while because he had been using a calculator with an illegal level of memory and processing power. Leyel suspected that Kispitorian got off easy at that—working with language as he did, getting the results he got, he might well have developed a calculator so intelligent that it could understand and produce human speech, which, if discovered, would have meant either the death penalty or a lynching.

No matter now. Kispitorian insisted to the end that his work was pure science, making no value judgments on whether the Empire's linguistic unity was a Good Thing or not. He was merely reporting that the natural condition of humanity was to speak many different languages. And Leyel believed that he was right.

Leyel could not help but feel that by combining Kispitorian's language studies with Magolissian's work with language-using primates he could come up with something important. But what was the connection? The primates had never developed their *own* languages—they only learned nouns and verbs presented to them by humans. So they could hardly have developed diversity of language. What connection could there be? Why would diversity ever have developed? Could it have something to do with why humans became human?

The primates used only a tiny subset of Standard. For that matter, so did most people—most of the two million words in Standard were used only by a few professionals who actually needed them, while the common vocabulary of humans throughout the Galaxy consisted of a few thousand words.

Oddly, though, it was that small subset of Standard that was the *most* susceptible to change. Highly esoteric scientific or technical papers written in 2000 G.E. were still easily readable. Slangy, colloquial passages in fiction, especially in dialogue, became almost unintelligible within five hundred years. The language shared by the most different communities was the language that changed the most. But over time, that mainstream language always changed *together*. It made no sense, then, for there ever to be linguistic diversity. Language changed most when it was most unified. Therefore when people were most divided, their language should remain most similar.

Never mind, Leyel. You're out of your discipline. Any competent linguist would know the answer to that.

But Leyel knew that wasn't likely to be true. People immersed in one discipline rarely questioned the axioms of their profession. Linguists all took for granted the fact that the language of an isolated population is invariably more archaic, less susceptible to change. Did they understand why?

Leyel got up from his chair. His eyes were tired from staring into the lector. His knees and back ached from staying so long in the same position. He wanted to lie down, but knew that if he did, he'd fall asleep. The curse of getting old—he could fall asleep so easily, yet could never stay asleep long enough to feel well rested. He didn't *want* to sleep now, though. He wanted to think.

No, that wasn't it. He wanted to *talk*. That's how his best and clearest ideas always came, under the pressure of conversation, when someone else's questions and arguments forced him to think sharply. To make connections, invent explanations. In a contest with another person, his adrenaline flowed, his brain made connections that would never otherwise be made.

Where was Deet? In years past, he would have been talking this through with Deet all day. All week. She would know as much about his research as he did, and would constantly say "Have you thought of this?" or "How can you possibly think that!" And he would have been making the same challenges to *her* work. In the old days.

But these weren't the old days. She didn't need him any more—she had her friends on the library staff. Nothing wrong with that, probably. After all, she wasn't *thinking* now, she was putting old thoughts into practice. She needed *them*, not *him*. But he still needed *her*. Did she ever think of that? I

might as well have gone to Terminus—damn Hari for refusing to let me go. I stayed for Deet’s sake, and yet I don’t have her after all, not when I need her. How *dare* Hari decide what was right for Leyel Forska!

Only Hari hadn’t decided, had he? He would have let Leyel go—without Deet. And Leyel hadn’t stayed with Deet so she could help him with his research. He had stayed with her because...because...

He couldn’t remember why. Love, of course. But he couldn’t think why that had been so important to him. It wasn’t important to *her*. Her idea of love these days was to urge him to come to the library. “You can do your research there. We could be together more during the days.”

The message was clear. The only way Leyel could remain part of Deet’s life was if he became part of her new “family” at the library. Well, she could forget that idea. If she chose to get swallowed up in that place, fine. If she chose to leave him for a bunch of—*indexers* and *cataloguers*—fine. Fine.

No. It wasn’t fine. He wanted to *talk* to her. Right now, at this moment, he wanted to tell her what he was thinking, wanted her to question him and argue with him until she made him come up with an answer, or lots of answers. He needed her to see what he wasn’t seeing. He needed her a lot more than *they* needed her.

He was out amid the thick pedestrian traffic of Maslo Boulevard before he realized that this was the first time since Hari’s funeral that he’d ventured beyond the immediate neighborhood of his apartment. It was the first time in months that he’d had anyplace to go. That’s what I’m doing here, he thought. I just need a change of scenery, a sense of destination. That’s the only reason I’m heading to the library. All that emotional nonsense back in the apartment, that was just my unconscious strategy for making myself get out among people again.

Leyel was almost cheerful when he got to the Imperial Library. He had been there many times over the years, but always for receptions or other public events—having his own high-capacity lector meant that he could get access to all the library’s records by cable. Other people—students, professors from poorer schools, lay readers—they actually *had* to come here to read. But that meant that they knew their way around the building. Except for finding the major lecture halls and reception rooms, Leyel hadn’t the faintest idea where anything was.

For the first time it dawned on him how very large the Imperial Library was. Deet had mentioned the numbers many times—a staff of more than five thousand, including machinists, carpenters, cooks, security, a virtual city in itself—but only now did Leyel realize that this meant that many people here had never met each other. Who could possibly know *five thousand* people by name? He couldn’t just walk up and ask for Deet by name. What was the department Deet worked in? She had changed so often, moving through the bureaucracy.

Everyone he saw was a patron—people at lectors, people at catalogues, even people reading books and magazines printed on paper. Where were the librarians? The few staff members moving through the aisles turned out not to be librarians at all—they were volunteer docents, helping newcomers learn how to use the lectors and catalogues. They knew as little about library staff as he did.

He finally found a room full of real librarians, sitting at calculators preparing the daily access and circulation reports. When he tried to speak to one, she merely waved a hand at him. He thought she was telling him to go away until he realized that her hand remained in the air, a finger pointing to the front of the room. Leyel moved toward the elevated desk where a fat, sleepy-looking middle-aged woman was lazily paging through long columns of figures, which stood in the air before her in military formation.

“Sorry to interrupt you,” he said softly.

She was resting her cheek on her hand. She didn’t even look at him when he spoke. But she answered. “I pray for interruptions. “

Only then did he notice that her eyes were framed with laugh lines, that her mouth even in repose turned upward into a faint smile.

“I’m looking for someone. My wife, in fact. Deet Forska. “

Her smile widened. She sat up. “You’re the beloved Leyel.”

It was an absurd thing for a stranger to say, but it pleased him nonetheless to realize that Deet must have spoken of him. Of course everyone would have known that Deet's husband was *the* Leyel Forska. But this woman hadn't said it that way, had she? Not as *the* Leyel Forska, the celebrity. No, here he was known as "the beloved Leyel." Even if this woman meant to tease him, Deet must have let it be known that she had some affection for him. He couldn't help but smile. With relief. He hadn't known that he feared the loss of her love so much, but now he wanted to laugh aloud, to move, to dance with pleasure.

"I imagine I am," said Leyel.

"I'm Zay Wax. Deet must have mentioned me, we have lunch every day."

No, she hadn't. She hardly mentioned anybody at the library, come to think of it. These two had lunch every day, and Leyel had never heard of her. "Yes, of course," said Leyel. "I'm glad to meet you."

"And I'm relieved to see that your feet actually touch the ground."

"Now and then."

"She works up in Indexing these days." Zay cleared her display.

"Is that on Trantor?"

Zay laughed. She typed in a few instructions and her display now filled with a map of the library complex. It was a complex pile of rooms and corridors, almost impossible to grasp. "This shows only this wing of the main building. Indexing is these four floors."

Four layers near the middle of the display turned to a brighter color.

"And here's where you are right now."

A small room on the first floor turned white. Looking at the labyrinth between the two lighted sections, Leyel had to laugh aloud. "Can't you just give me a ticket to guide me?"

"Our tickets only lead you to places where patrons are allowed. But this isn't really hard, Lord Forska. After all, you're a genius, aren't you?"

"Not at the interior geography of buildings, whatever lies Deet might have told you."

"You just go out this door and straight down the corridor to the elevators—can't miss them. Go up to fifteen. When you get out, turn as if you were continuing down the same corridor, and after a while you go through an archway that says 'Indexing.' Then you lean back your head and bellow 'Deet' as loud as you can. Do that a few times and either she'll come or security will arrest you."

"That's what I was going to do if I *didn't* find somebody to guide me."

"I was hoping you'd ask me." Zay stood up and spoke loudly to the busy librarians. "The cat's going away. The mice can play."

"About time," one of them said. They all laughed. But they kept working.

"Follow me, Lord Forska."

"Leyel, please."

"Oh, you're such a flirt." When she stood, she was even shorter and fatter than she had looked sitting down. "Follow me."

They conversed cheerfully about nothing much on the way down the corridor. Inside the elevator, they hooked their feet under the rail as the gravitic repulsion kicked in. Leyel was so used to weightlessness after all these years of using elevators on Trantor that he never noticed. But Zay let her arms float in the air and sighed noisily. "I *love* riding the elevator," she said. For the first time Leyel realized that weightlessness must be a great relief to someone carrying as many extra kilograms as Zay Wax. When the elevator stopped, Zay made a great show of staggering out as if under a great burden. "My idea of heaven is to live forever in gravitic repulsion."

"You can get gravitic repulsion for your apartment, if you live on the top floor."

"Maybe *you* can," said Zay. "But *I* have to live on a librarian's salary."

Leyel was mortified. He had always been careful not to flaunt his wealth, but then, he had rarely talked at any length with people who couldn't afford gravitic repulsion. "Sorry," he said. "I don't think I

could either, these days.”

“Yes, I heard you squandered your fortune on a real bang-up funeral.”

Startled that she would speak so openly of it, he tried to answer in the same joking tone. “I suppose you could look at it that way. “

“I say it was worth it,” she said. She looked slyly up at him. “I knew Hari, you know. Losing him cost humanity more than if Trantor’s sun went nova.”

“Maybe,” said Leyel. The conversation was getting out of hand. Time to be cautious.

“Oh, don’t worry. I’m not a snitch for the Pubs. Here’s the Golden Archway into Indexing. The Land of Subtle Conceptual Connections.”

Through the arch, it was as though they had passed into a completely different building. The style and trim were the same as before, with deeply lustrous fabrics on the walls and ceiling and floor made of the same smooth sound-absorbing plastic, glowing faintly with white light. But now all pretense at symmetry was gone. The ceiling was at different heights, almost at random; on the left and right there might be doors or archways, stairs or ramps, an alcove or a huge hall filled with columns, shelves of books and works of art surrounding tables where indexers worked with a half-dozen scribes and lecturers at once.

“The form fits the function,” said Zay.

“I’m afraid I’m rubbernecking like a first-time visitor to Trantor.”

“It’s a strange place. But the architect was the daughter of an indexer, so she knew that standard, orderly, symmetrical interior maps are the enemy of freely connective thought. The finest touch—and the most expensive too, I’m afraid—is the fact that from day to day the layout is rearranged. “

“Rearranged! The rooms move?”

“A series of random routines in the master calculator. There are rules, but the program isn’t afraid to waste space, either. Some days only one room is changed, moved off to some completely different place in the Indexing area. Other days, everything is changed. The only constant is the archway leading in. I really wasn’t joking when I said you should come here and bellow.”

“But—the indexers must spend the whole morning just finding their stations.”

“Not at all. Any indexer can work from any station.”

“Ah. So they just call up the job they were working on the day before.”

“No. They merely pick up on the job that is already in progress on the station they happen to choose that day.”

“Chaos!” said Leyel.

“Exactly. How do you think a good hyperindex is made? If one person alone indexes a book, then the only connections that book will make are the ones that person knows about. Instead, each indexer is forced to skim through what his predecessor did the day before. Inevitably he’ll add some new connections that the other indexer didn’t think of. The environment, the work pattern, everything is designed to break down habits of thought, to make everything surprising, everything *new*.”

“To keep everybody off balance. “

“Exactly. Your mind works quickly when you’re running along the edge of the precipice.”

“By that reckoning, acrobats should all be geniuses.”

“Nonsense. The whole labor of acrobats is to learn their routines so perfectly they *never* lose balance. An acrobat who improvises is soon dead. But indexers, when they lose their balance, they fall into wonderful discoveries. That’s why the indexes of the Imperial Library are the only ones worth having. They startle and challenge as you read. All the others are just—clerical lists.”

“Deet never mentioned this.”

“Indexers rarely discuss what they’re doing. You can’t really explain it anyway. “

“How long has Deet been an indexer?”

“Not long, really. She’s still a novice. But I hear she’s very, very good.”

“Where *is* she?”

Zay grinned. Then she tipped her head back and bellowed. “Deet!”

The sound seemed to be swallowed up at once in the labyrinth. There was no answer.

“Not nearby, I guess,” said Zay. “We’ll have to probe a little deeper.”

“Couldn’t we just *ask* somebody where she is?”

“Who would know?”

It took two more floors and three more shouts before they heard a faint answering cry. “Over here!”

They followed the sound. Deet kept calling out, so they could find her.

“I got the flower room today, Zay! Violets!”

The indexers they passed along the way all looked up—some smiled, some frowned.

“Doesn’t it interfere with things?” asked Leye. “All this shouting?”

“Indexers *need* interruption. It breaks up the chain of thought. When they look back down, they have to rethink what they were doing.”

Deet, not so far away now, called again. “The smell is so intoxicating. Imagine—the same room twice in a month!”

“Are indexers often hospitalized?” Leye asked quietly.

“For what?”

“Stress.”

“There’s no stress on this job,” said Zay. “Just play. We come up here as a *reward* for working in other parts of the library.”

“I see. This is the time when librarians actually get to *read* the books in the library.”

“We all chose this career because we love books for their own sake. Even the old inefficient corruptible paper ones. Indexing is like—writing in the margins.”

The notion was startling. “Writing in someone *else’s* book?”

“It used to be done all the time, Leye. How can you possibly engage in dialogue with the author without writing your answers and arguments in the margins? Here she is.” Zay preceded him under a low arch and down a few steps.

“I heard a man’s voice with you, Zay,” said Deet.

“Mine,” said Leye. He turned a corner and saw her there. After such a long journey to reach her, he thought for a dizzying moment that he didn’t recognize her. That the library had randomized the librarians as well as the rooms, and he had happened upon a woman who merely resembled his long-familiar wife; he would have to reacquaint himself with her from the beginning.

“I thought so,” said Deet. She got up from her station and embraced him. Even this startled him, though she usually embraced him upon meeting. It’s only the setting that’s different, he told himself. I’m only surprised because usually she greets me like this at home, in familiar surroundings. And usually it’s Deet arriving, not me.

Or was there, after all, a greater warmth in her greeting here? As if she loved him more in this place than at home? Or, perhaps, as if the new Deet were simply a warmer, more comfortable person?

I thought that she was comfortable with me.

Leye felt uneasy, shy with her. “If I’d known my coming would cause so much trouble,” he began. Why did he need so badly to apologize?

“What trouble?” asked Zay.

“Shouting. Interrupting.”

“Listen to him, Deet. He thinks the world has stopped because of a couple of shouts.”

In the distance they could hear a man bellowing someone’s name.

“Happens all the time,” said Zay. “I’d better get back. Some lordling from Mahagonny is probably

fuming because I haven't granted his request for access to the Imperial account books."

"Nice to meet you," said Leyel.

"Good luck finding your way back," said Deet.

"Easy this time," said Zay. She paused only once on her way through the door, not to speak, but to slide a metallic wafer along an almost unnoticeable slot in the doorframe, above eye level. She turned back and winked at Deet. Then she was gone.

Leyel didn't ask what she had done—if it were his business, something would have been said. But he suspected that Zay had either turned on or turned off a recording system. Unsure of whether they had privacy here from the library staff, Leyel merely stood for a moment, looking around. Deet's room really was filled with violets, real ones, growing out of cracks and apertures in the floor and walls. The smell was clear but not overpowering. "What is this room *for*?"

"For *me*. Today, anyway. I'm so glad you came."

"You never told me about this place. "

"I didn't know about it until I was assigned to this section. Nobody talks about Indexing. We never tell outsiders. The architect died three thousand years ago. Only our own machinists understand how it works. It's like"

"Fairyland."

"Exactly."

"A place where all the rules of the universe are suspended."

"Not all. We still stick with good old gravity. Inertia. That sort of thing."

"This place is right for you, Deet. This room. "

"Most people go years without getting the flower room. It isn't always violets, you know. Sometimes climbing roses. Sometimes periwinkle. They say there's really a dozen flower rooms, but never more than one at a time is accessible. It's been violets for me both times, though. "

Leyel couldn't help himself. He laughed. It was funny. It was delightful. What did this have to do with a library? And, yet what a marvelous thing to have hidden away in the heart of this somber place. He sat down on a chair. Violets grew out of the top of the chairback, so that flowers brushed his shoulders.

"You finally got tired of staying in the apartment all day?" asked Deet.

Of course she would wonder why he finally came out, after all her invitations had been so long ignored. Yet he wasn't sure if he could speak frankly. "I needed to talk with you." He glanced back at the slot Zay had used in the doorframe. "Alone," he said.

Was that a look of dread that crossed her face?

"We're alone," Deet said quietly. "Zay saw to that. Truly alone, as we can't be even in the apartment. "

It took Leyel a moment to realize what she was asserting. He dared not even speak the word. So he mouthed his question: Pubs?

"They never bother with the library in their normal spying. Even if they set up something special for you, there's now an interference field blocking out our conversation. Chances are, though, that they won't bother to monitor you again until you leave here."

She seemed edgy. Impatient. As if she didn't like having this conversation. As if she wanted him to get on with it, or maybe just get it over with.

"If you don't mind," he said. "I haven't interrupted you here before, I thought that just this once—"

"Of course," she said. But she was still tense. As if she feared what he might say.

So he explained to her all his thoughts about language. All that he had gleaned from Kispitorian's and Magolissian's work. She seemed to relax almost as soon as it became clear he was talking about his research. What did she dread, he wondered. Was she afraid I came to talk about our relationship? She hardly needed to fear *that*. He had no intention of making things more difficult by whining about things that could riot be helped.

When he was through explaining the ideas that had come to him, she nodded carefully—as she had done a thousand times before, after he explained an idea or argument. “I don’t know,” she finally said. As so many times before, she was reluctant to commit herself to an immediate response.

And, as he had often done, he insisted. “But what do you *think*?”

She pursed her lips. “Just offhand—I’ve never tried a serious linguistic application of community theory, beyond jargon formation, so this is just my first thought—but try this. Maybe small isolated populations *guard* their language—jealously, because it’s part of who they are. Maybe language is the most powerful ritual of all, so that people who have the same language are one in a way that people who can’t understand each other’s speech never are. We’d never know, would we, since everybody for ten thousand years has spoken Standard.”

“So it isn’t the size of the population, then, so much as—”

“How much they *care* about their language. How much it defines them as a community. A large population starts to think that everybody talks like them. They want to *distinguish* themselves, form a separate identity. Then they start developing jargons and slangs to separate themselves from others. Isn’t that what happens to common speech? Children try to find ways of talking that their parents don’t use. Professionals talk in private vocabularies so laymen won’t know the passwords. All rituals for community definition.”

Leyel nodded gravely, but he had one obvious doubt.

Obvious enough that Deet knew it, too. “Yes, yes, I know, Leyel. I immediately interpreted your question in terms of my own discipline. Like physicists who think that everything can be explained by physics. “

Leyel laughed. “I thought of that, but what you said makes sense. And it would explain why the natural tendency of communities is to diversify language. We want a common tongue, a language of open discourse. But we also want private languages. Except a *completely* private language would be useless—whom would we talk to? So wherever a community forms, it creates at least a few linguistic barriers to outsiders, a few shibboleths that only insiders will know. “

“And the more allegiance a person has to a community, the more fluent he’ll become in that language, and the more he’ll speak it.”

“Yes, it makes sense,” said Leyel. “So easy. You see how much I need you?”

He knew that his words were a mild rebuke—why weren’t you home when I needed you—but he couldn’t resist saying it. Sitting here with Deet, even in this strange and redolent place, felt right and comfortable. How could she have withdrawn from him? To him, her presence was what made a place home. To her, this place was home whether he was there or not.

He tried to put it in words—in abstract words, so it wouldn’t sting. “I think the greatest tragedy is when one person has more allegiance to his community than any of the other members. “

Deet only half smiled and raised her eyebrows. She didn’t know what he was getting at.

“He speaks the community language all the time,” said Leyel. “Only nobody else ever speaks it to him, or not enough anyway. And the more he speaks it, the more he alienates the others and drives them away, until he’s alone. Can you imagine anything more sad? Somebody who’s filled up with a language, hungry to speak, to hear it spoken, and yet there’s no one left who understands a word of it.”

She nodded, her eyes searching him. Does she understand what I’m saying? He waited for her to speak. He had said all he dared to say.

“But imagine this,” she finally said. “What if he left that little place where no one understood him, and went over a hill to a new place, and all of a sudden he heard a hundred voices, a thousand, speaking the words he had treasured all those lonely years. And then he realized that he had never really known the language at all. The words had hundreds of meanings and nuances he had never guessed. Because each speaker changed the language a little just by speaking it. And when he spoke at last, his own voice sounded like music in his ears, and the others listened with delight, with rapture, his music was like the water of life pouring from a fountain, and he knew that he had never been home before. “

Leyel couldn't remember hearing Deet sound so—rhapsodic, that was it, she herself was singing. She is the person she was talking about. In this place, her voice is different, that's what she meant. At home with me, she's been alone. Here in the library she's found others who speak her secret language. It isn't that she didn't want our marriage to succeed. She hoped for it, but I never understood her. These people did. Do. She's home here, that's what she's telling me.

"I understand," he said.

"Do you?" She looked searchingly into his face.

"I think so. It's all right."

She gave him a quizzical look.

"I mean, it's fine. It's good. This place. It's fine."

She looked relieved, but not completely. "You shouldn't be so *sad* about it, Leyel. This is a happy place. And you could do everything here that you ever did at home."

Except love you as the other part of me, and have you love me as the other part of you. "Yes, I'm sure."

"No, I mean it. What you're working on—I can see that you're getting close to something. Why not work on it *here*, where we can talk about it?"

Leyel shrugged.

"You *are* getting close, aren't you?"

"How do I know? I'm thrashing around like a drowning man in the ocean at night. Maybe I'm close to shore, and maybe I'm just swimming farther out to sea."

"Well, what do you have? Didn't we get closer just now?"

"No. This language thing—if it's just an aspect of community theory, it can't be the answer to human origin."

"Why not?"

"Because many primates have communities. A lot of other animals. Herding animals, for instance. Even schools of *fish*. Bees. Ants. Every multicelled organism is a community, for that matter. So if linguistic diversion grows out of community, then it's inherent in prehuman animals and therefore isn't part of the definition of humanity."

"Oh. I guess not."

"Right."

She looked disappointed. As if she had really hoped they would find the answer to the origin question right there, that very day.

Leyel stood up. "Oh well. Thanks for your help. "

"I don't think I helped."

"Oh, you did. You showed me I was going up a dead-end road. You saved me a lot of wasted—thought. That's progress, in science, to know which answers aren't true."

His words had a double meaning, of course. She had also shown him that their marriage was a dead-end road. Maybe she understood him. Maybe not. It didn't matter—he had understood *her*. That little story about a lonely person finally discovering a place where she could be at home—how could he miss the point of that?

"Leyel," she said. "Why not put your question to the indexers?"

"Do you think the library researchers could find answers where *I* haven't?"

"Not the research department. *Indexing*. "

"What do you mean?"

"Write down your questions. All the avenues you've pursued. Linguistic diversity. Primate language. And the other questions, the old ones. Archaeological, historical approaches. Biological. Kinship patterns. Customs. Everything you can think of. Just put it together as questions. And then we'll have them index it."

“Index my *questions*?”

“*It’s what we do—we read things and think of other things that might be related somehow, and we connect them. We don’t say what the connection means, but we know that it means something, that the connection is real. We won’t give you answers, Leyel, but if you follow the index, it might help you to think of connections. Do you see what I mean?*”

“I never thought of that. Do you think a couple of indexers might have the time to work on it?”

“Not a couple of us. *All of us.* “

“Oh, that’s absurd, Deet. I wouldn’t even ask it.”

“I would. We aren’t supervised up here, Leyel. We don’t meet quotas. Our job is to read and think. Usually we have a few hundred projects going, but for a day we could easily work on the same document.”

“It would be a waste. I can’t publish anything, Deet.”

“It doesn’t have to be published. Don’t you understand? Nobody but us knows what we do here. We can take it as an unpublished document and work on it just the same. It won’t ever have to go online for the library as a whole.”

Leyel shook his head. “And then if they lead me to the answer—what, will we publish it with two hundred bylines?”

“It’ll be *your* paper, Leyel. We’re just indexers, not authors. You’ll still have to make the connections. Let us try. Let us be *part* of this.”

Suddenly Leyel understood why she was so insistent on this. Getting him involved with the library was her way of pretending she was still part of his life. She could believe she hadn’t left him, if he became part of her new community.

Didn’t she know how unbearable that would be? To see her here, so happy without him? To come here as just one friend among many, when once they had been—or he had thought they were—one indivisible soul? How could he possibly do such a thing?

And yet she wanted it, he could see it in the way she was looking at him, so girlish, so pleading that it made him think of when they were first in love, on another world—she would look at him like that whenever he insisted that he had to leave. Whenever she thought she might be losing him.

Doesn’t she know who has lost whom?

Never mind. What did it matter if she didn’t understand? If it would make her happy to have him pretend to be part of her new home, part of these librarians—if she wanted him to submit his life’s work to the ministrations of these absurd indexers, then why not? What would it cost him? Maybe the process of writing down all his questions in some coherent order would help him. And maybe she was right—maybe a Trantorian index would help him solve the origin question.

Maybe if he came here, he could still be a small part of her life. It wouldn’t be like marriage. But since that was impossible, then at least he could have enough of her here that he could remain himself, remain the person that he had become because of loving her for all these years.

“Fine,” he said. “I’ll write it up and bring it in.”

“I really think we can help.”

“Yes,” he said, pretending to more certainty than he felt. “Maybe.” He started for the door.

“Do you have to leave already?”

He nodded.

“Are you sure you can find your way out?”

“Unless the rooms have moved.”

“No, only at night.”

“Then I’ll find my way out just fine.” He took a few steps toward her, then stopped.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

“Oh.” She sounded disappointed. “I thought you were going to kiss me goodbye.” Then she puckered up like a three-year-old child.

He laughed. He kissed her—like a three-year-old—and then he left.

For two days he brooded. Saw her off in the morning, then tried to read, to watch the vids, anything. Nothing held his attention. He took walks. He even went topside once, to see the sky overhead—it was night, thick with stars. None of it engaged him. Nothing *held*. One of the vid programs had a moment, just briefly, a scene on a semiarid world, where a strange plant grew that dried out at maturity, broke off at the root, and then let the wind blow it around, scattering seeds. For a moment he felt a dizzying empathy with the plant as it tumbled by—am I as dry as that, hurtling through dead land? But no, he knew even that wasn’t true, because the tumbleweed had life enough left in it to scatter seeds. Leyel had no seed left. That was scattered years ago.

On the third morning he looked at himself in the mirror and laughed grimly. “Is this how people feel before they kill themselves?” he asked. Of course not—he knew that he was being melodramatic. He felt no desire to die.

But then it occurred to him that if this feeling of uselessness kept on, if he never found anything to engage himself, then he might as well be dead, mightn’t he, because his being alive wouldn’t accomplish much more than keeping his clothes warm.

He sat down at the scriptor and began writing down questions. Then, under each question, he would explain how he had already pursued that particular avenue and why it didn’t yield the answer to the origin question. More questions would come up then—and he was right, the mere process of summarizing his own fruitless research made answers seem tantalizingly close. It was a good exercise. And even if he never found an answer, this list of questions might be of help to someone with a clearer intellect—or better information—decades or centuries or millennia from now.

Deet came home and went to bed with Leyel still typing away. She knew the look he had when he was fully engaged in writing—she did nothing to disturb him. He noticed her enough to realize that she was carefully leaving him alone. Then he settled back into writing.

The next morning she awoke to find him lying in bed beside her, still dressed. A personal message capsule lay on the floor in the doorway from the bedroom. He had finished his questions. She bent over, picked it up, took it with her to the library.

“His questions aren’t academic after all, Deet.”

“I told you they weren’t.”

“Hari was right. For all that he seemed to be a dilettante, with his money and his rejection of the universities, he’s a man of substance.”

“Will the Second Foundation benefit, then, if he comes up with an answer to his question?”

“I don’t know, Deet. Hari was the fortune-teller. Presumably mankind is already human, so it isn’t as if we have to start the process over.”

“Do you think not?”

“What, should we find some uninhabited planet and put some newborns on it and let them grow up feral, and then come back in a thousand years and try to turn them human?”

“I have a better idea. Let’s take ten thousand worlds filled with people who live their lives like animals, always hungry, always quick with their teeth and their claws, and let’s strip away the veneer of civilization to expose to them what they really are. And then, when they see themselves clearly, let’s come back and teach them how to be *really* human this time, instead of only having bits and flashes of humanity.”

“All right. Let’s do that.”

“I knew you’d see it my way.”

“Just make sure your husband finds out *how* the trick is done. Then we have all the time in the world to set it up and pull it off.”

When the index was done, Deet brought Leyel with her to the library when she went to work in the

morning. She did not take him to Indexing, but rather installed him in a private research room lined with vids—only instead of giving the illusion of windows looking out onto an outside scene, the screens filled all the walls from floor to ceiling, so it seemed that he was on a pinnacle high above the scene, without walls or even a railing to keep him from falling off. It gave him flashes of vertigo when he looked around—only the door broke the illusion. For a moment he thought of asking for a different room. But then he remembered Indexing, and realized that maybe he'd do better work if he too felt a bit off balance all the time.

At first the indexing seemed obvious. He brought the first page of his questions to the lector display and began to read. The lector would track his pupils, so that whenever he paused to gaze at a word, other references would begin to pop up in the space beside the page he was reading. Then he'd glance at one of the references. When it was uninteresting or obvious, he'd skip to the next reference, and the first one would slide back on the display, out of the way, but still there if he changed his mind and wanted it.

If a reference engaged him, then when he reached the last line of the part of it on display, it would expand to full-page size and slide over to stand in front of the main text. Then, if this new material had been indexed, it would trigger new references—and so on, leading him farther and farther away from the original document until he finally decided to go back and pick up where he left off.

So far, this was what any index could be expected to do. It was only as he moved farther into reading his own questions that he began to realize the quirkiness of this index. Usually, index references were tied to important words, so that if you just wanted to stop and think without bringing up a bunch of references you didn't want, all you had to do was keep your gaze focused in an area of placeholder words, empty phrases like "If this were all that could be..." Anyone who made it a habit to read indexed works soon learned this trick and used it till it became reflex.

But when Leye stopped on such empty phrases, references came up anyway. And instead of having a clear relationship to the text, sometimes the references were perverse or comic or argumentative. For instance, he paused in the middle of reading his argument that archaeological searches for "primitiveness" were useless in the search for origins because all "primitive" cultures represented a decline from a star-going culture. He had written the phrase "All this primitivism is useful only because it predicts what we might become if we're careless and don't preserve our fragile links with civilization." By habit his eyes focused on the empty words "what we might become if." Nobody could index a phrase like that.

Yet they had. Several references appeared. And so instead of staying within his reverie, he was distracted, drawn to what the indexers had tied to such an absurd phrase.

One of the references was a nursery rhyme that he had forgotten he knew:

Wrinkly Grandma Posey

Rockets all are rosy.

Lift off, drift off,

All fall down.

Why in the world had the indexer put *that* in? The first thought that came to Leye's mind was himself and some of the servants' children, holding hands and walking in a circle, round and round till they came to the last words, whereupon they threw themselves to the ground and laughed insanely. The sort of game that only little children could possibly think was fun.

Since his eyes lingered on the poem, it moved to the main document display and new references appeared. One was a scholarly article on the evolution of the poem, speculating that it might have arisen during the early days of starflight on the planet of origin, when rockets may have been used to escape from a planet's gravity well. Was that why this poem had been indexed to his article? Because it was tied to the planet of origin?

No, that was too obvious. Another article about the poem was more helpful. It rejected the early-days-of-rockets idea, because the earliest versions of the poem never used the word "rocket." "The oldest extant version went like this:

Wrinkle down a rosy,
Pock—a fock—a posy,
Lash us, dash us,
All fall down.

Obviously, said the commentator, these were mostly nonsense words—the later versions had arisen because children had insisted on trying to make sense of them.

And it occurred to Leye that perhaps this was why the indexer had linked this poem to his phrase—because the poem had once been nonsense, but we insisted on making sense out of it.

Was this a comment on Leye's whole search for origins? Did the indexer think it was useless?

No—the poem had been tied to the empty phrase “what we might become if.” Maybe the indexer was saying that human beings are like this poem—our lives make no sense, but we insist on making sense out of them. Didn't Deet say something like that once, when she was talking about the role of storytelling in community formation? The universe resists causality, she said. But human intelligence demands it. So we tell stories to impose causal relationships among the unconnected events of the world around us.

That includes ourselves, doesn't it? Our own lives are nonsense, but we impose a story on them, we sort our memories into cause-and-effect chains, forcing them to make sense even though they don't. Then we take the sum of our stories and call it our “self.” This poem shows us the process—from randomness to meaning—and then we think our meanings are “true.”

But somehow all the children had come to agree on the new version of the poem. By the year 2000 G.E., only the final and current version existed in all the worlds, and it had remained constant ever since. How was it that all the children on every world came to agree on the same version? How did the change spread? Did ten thousand kids on ten thousand worlds happen to make up the same changes?

It had to be word of mouth. Some kid somewhere made a few changes, and his version spread. A few years, and all the children in his neighborhood use the new version, and then all the kids in his city, on his planet. It could happen very quickly, in fact, because each generation of children lasts only a few years—seven-year-olds might take the new version as a joke, but repeat it often enough that five-year-olds think it's the true version of the poem, and within a few years there's nobody left among the children who remembers the old way.

A thousand years is long enough for the new version of the poem to spread. Or for five or a dozen new versions to collide and get absorbed into each other and then spread back, changed, to worlds that had revised the poem once or twice already.

And as Leye sat there, thinking these thoughts, he conjured up an image in his mind of a network of children, bound to each other by the threads of this poem, extending from planet to planet throughout the Empire, and then back through time, from one generation of children to the previous one, a three-dimensional fabric that bound all children together from the beginning.

And yet as each child grew up, he cut himself free from the fabric of that poem. No longer would he hear the words “Wrinkly Grandma Posey” and immediately join hands with the child next to him. He wasn't part of the song any more.

But his own children were. And then his grandchildren. All joining hands with each other, changing from circle to circle, in a never-ending human chain reaching back to some long-forgotten ritual on one of the worlds of mankind—maybe, maybe on the planet of origin itself.

The vision was so clear, so overpowering, that when he finally noticed the lector display it was as sudden and startling as waking up. He had to sit there, breathing shallowly, until he calmed himself, until his heart stopped beating so fast.

He had found some part of his answer, though he didn't understand it yet. That fabric connecting all the children, that was part of what made us human, though he didn't know why. This strange and perverse indexing of a meaningless phrase had brought him a new way of looking at the problem. Not that the universal culture of children was a new idea. Just that he had never thought of it as having anything to do with the origin question.

Was this what the indexer meant by including this poem? Had the indexer also seen this vision?

Maybe, but probably not. It might have been nothing more than the idea of becoming something that made the indexer think of transformation—becoming old, like wrinkly Grandma Posey? Or it might have been a general thought about the spread of humanity through the stars, away from the planet of origin, that made the indexer remember how the poem seemed to tell of rockets that rise up from a planet, drift for a while, then come down to settle on a planet. Who knows what the poem meant to the indexer? Who knows why it occurred to her to link it with his document on that particular phrase?

Then Leyel realized that in his imagination, he was thinking of Deet making that particular connection. There was no reason to think it was her work, except that in his mind she was all the indexers. She had joined them, become one of them, and so when indexing work was being done, she was part of it. That's what it meant to be part of a community—all its works became, to a degree, your works. All that the indexers did, Deet was a part of it, and therefore Deet had done it.

Again the image of a fabric came to mind, only this time it was a topologically impossible fabric, twisted into itself so that no matter what part of the edge of it you held, you held the entire edge, and the middle, too. It was all one thing, and each part held the whole within it.

But if that was true, then when Deet came to join the library, so did Leyel, because she contained Leyel within her. So in coming here, she had not left him at all. Instead, she had woven him into a new fabric, so that instead of losing something he was gaining. He was part of all this, because *she* was, and so if he lost her it would only be because he rejected her.

Leyel covered his eyes with his hands. How did his meandering thoughts about the origin question lead him to thinking about his marriage? Here he thought he was on the verge of profound understanding, and then he fell back into self-absorption.

He cleared away all the references to “Wrinkly Grandma Posey” or “Wrinkle Down a Rosy” or whatever it was, then returned to reading his original document, trying to confine his thoughts to the subject at hand.

Yet it was a losing battle. He could not escape from the seductive distraction of the index. He'd be reading about tool use and technology, and how it could not be the dividing line between human and animal because there were animals that made tools and taught their use to others.

Then, suddenly, the index would have him reading an ancient terror tale about a man who wanted to be the greatest genius of all time, and he believed that the only thing preventing him from achieving greatness was the hours he lost in sleep. So he invented a machine to sleep for him, and it worked very well until he realized that the machine was having all his dreams. Then he demanded that his machine tell him what it was dreaming.

The machine poured forth the most astonishing, brilliant thoughts ever imagined by any man—far wiser than anything this man had ever written during his waking hours. The man took a hammer and smashed the machine, so that he could have his dreams back. But even when he started sleeping again, he was never able to come close to the clarity of thought that the machine had had.

Of course he could never publish what the machine had written—it would be unthinkable to put forth the product of a machine as if it were the work of a man. After the man died—in despair—people found the printed text of what the machine had written, and thought the man had written it and hidden it away. They published it, and he was widely acclaimed as the greatest genius who had ever lived.

This was universally regarded as an obscenely horrifying tale because it had a machine stealing part of a man's mind and using it to destroy him, a common theme. But why did the indexer refer to it in the midst of a discussion of tool-making?

Wondering about that led Leyel to think that this story itself was a kind of tool. Just like the machine the man in the story had made. The storyteller gave his dreams to the story, and then when people heard it or read it, his dreams—his nightmares—came out to live in their memories. Clear and sharp and terrible and true, those dreams they received. And yet if he tried to *tell* them the same truths, directly, not in the form of a story, people would think his ideas were silly and small.

And then Leyel remembered what Deet had said about how people absorb stories from their communities and take them into themselves and use these stories to form their own spiritual autobiography. They remember doing what the heroes of the stories did, and so they continue to act out each hero's character in their own lives, or, failing that, they measure themselves against the standard the story set for them. Stories become the human conscience, the human mirror.

Again, as so many other times, he ended these ruminations with his hands pressed over his eyes, trying to shut out—or lock in?—images of fabrics and mirrors, worlds and atoms, until finally, finally, he opened his eyes and saw Deet and Zay sitting in front of him.

No, leaning over him. He was on a low bed, and they knelt beside him.

"Am I ill?" he asked. "I hope not," said Deet. "We found you on the floor. You're exhausted, Leyel. I've been telling you—you have to eat, you have to get a normal amount of sleep. You're not young enough to keep up this work schedule."

"I've barely started."

Zay laughed lightly. "Listen to him, Deet. I told you he was so caught up in this that he didn't even know what day it was."

"You've been doing this for three weeks, Leyel. For the last week you haven't even come home. I bring you food, and you won't eat. People talk to you, and you forget that you're in a conversation, you just drift off into some sort of trance. Leyel, I wish I'd never brought you here, I wish I'd never suggested indexing—"

"No!" Leyel cried. He struggled to sit up.

At first Deet tried to push him back down, insisting he should rest. It was Zay who helped him sit. "Let the man talk," she said. "Just because you're his wife doesn't mean you can stop him from talking."

"The index is wonderful," said Leyel. "Like a tunnel opened up into my own mind. I keep seeing light just *that* far out of reach, and then I wake up and it's just me alone on a pinnacle except for the pages up on the lector. I keep losing it—"

"No, Leyel, we keep losing *you*. The index is poisoning you, it's taking over your mind—"

"Don't be absurd, Deet. You're the one who suggested this, and you're right. The index keeps surprising me, making me think in new ways. There are some answers already."

"Answers?" asked Zay.

"I don't know how well I can explain it. What makes us human. It has to do with communities and stories and tools and—it has to do with you and me, Deet."

"I should hope we're human," she said. Teasing him, but also urging him on.

"We lived together all those years, and we formed a community—with our children, till they left, and then just us. But we were like animals."

"Only sometimes," she said.

"I mean like herding animals, or primate tribes, or any community that's bound together only by the rituals and patterns of the present moment. We had our customs, our habits. Our private language of words and gestures, our dances, all the things that flocks of geese and hives of bees can do."

"Very primitive."

"Yes, that's right, don't you see? That's a community that dies with each generation. When we die, Deet, it will all be gone with us. Other people will marry, but none of them will know our dances and songs and language and—"

"Our children will."

"No, that's my point. They knew us, they even think they *know* us, but they were never part of the community of our marriage. Nobody is. Nobody *can* be. That's why, when I thought you were leaving me for this"

"When did you think that I—"

"Hush, Deet," said Zay. "Let the man babble."

“When I thought you were leaving me, I felt like I was dead, like I was losing everything, because if you weren’t part of our marriage, then there was nothing left. You see?”

“I don’t see what that has to do with human origins, Leye. I only know that I would never leave you, and I can’t believe that you could think—”

“Don’t distract him, Deet.”

“It’s the children. All the children. They play Wrinkly Grandma Posey, and then they grow up and don’t play any more, so the actual community of these particular five or six children doesn’t exist any more—but other kids are still doing the dance. Chanting the poem. For ten thousand years!”

“This makes us human? Nursery rhymes?”

“They’re all part of the same community! Across all the empty space between the stars, there are still connections, they’re still somehow the *same kids*. Ten thousand years, ten thousand worlds, quintillions of children, and they all knew the poem, they all did the dance. Story and ritual—it doesn’t die with the tribe, it doesn’t stop at the border. Children who never met face-to-face, who lived so far apart that the light from one star still hasn’t reached the other, they belonged to the same community. We’re human because we conquered time and space. We conquered the barrier of perpetual ignorance between one person and another. We found a way to slip my memories into your head, and yours into mine.”

“But these are the ideas you already rejected, Leye. Language and community and—”

“No! No, not just language, not just tribes of chimpanzees chattering at each other. *Stories*, epic tales that define a community, mythic tales that teach us how the world works, we use them to create each other. We became a different species, we became *human*, because we found a way to extend gestation beyond the womb, a way to give each child ten thousand parents that he’ll never meet face-to-face.”

Then, at last, Leye fell silent, trapped by the inadequacy of his words. They couldn’t tell what he had seen in his mind. If they didn’t already understand, they never would.

“Yes,” said Zay. “I think indexing your paper was a very good idea.”

Leye sighed and lay back down on the bed. “I shouldn’t have tried.”

“On the contrary, you’ve succeeded,” said Zay. Deet shook her head. Leye knew why—Deet was trying to signal Zay that she shouldn’t attempt to soothe Leye with false praise.

“Don’t hush me, Deet. I know what I’m saying. I may not know Leye as well as you do, but I know truth when I hear it. In a way, I think Hari knew it instinctively. That’s why he insisted on all his silly holodisplays, forcing the poor citizens of Terminus to put up with his pontificating every few years. It was his way of continuing to create them, of remaining alive within them. Making them feel like their lives had purpose behind them. Mythic and epic story, both at once. They’ll all carry a bit of Hari Seldon within them just the way that children carry their parents with them to the grave.”

At first Leye could only hear the idea that Hari would have approved of his ideas of human origin. Then he began to realize that there was much more to what Zay had said than simple affirmation.

“You knew Hari Seldon?”

“A little,” said Zay.

“Either tell him or don’t,” said Deet. “You can’t take him this far in, and not bring him the rest of the way.”

“I knew Hari the way you know Deet,” said Zay.

“No,” said Leye. “He would have mentioned you.”

“Would he? He never mentioned his students.”

“He had thousands of students.”

“I know, Leye. I saw them come and fill his lecture halls and listen to the half-baked fragments of psychohistory that he taught them. But then he’d come away, here to the library, into a room where the Pubs never go, where he could speak words that the Pubs would never hear, and there he’d teach his

real students. Here is the only place where the science of psychohistory lives on, where Deet's ideas about the formation of community actually have application, where your own vision of the origin of humanity will shape our calculations for the next thousand years. "

Leyel was dumbfounded. "In the Imperial Library? Hari had his own college here in the library?"

"Where else? He had to leave us at the end, when it was time to go public with his predictions of the Empire's fall. Then the Pubs started watching him in earnest, and in order to keep them from finding us, he couldn't ever come back here again. It was the most terrible thing that ever happened to us. As if he died, for us, years before his body died. He was part of us, Leyel, the way that you and Deet are part of each other. She knows. She joined us before he left."

It stung. To have had such a great secret, and not to have been included. "Why Deet, and not me?"

"Don't you know, Leyel? Our little community's survival was the most important thing. As long as you were Leyel Forska, master of one of the greatest fortunes in history, you couldn't possibly be part of this—it would have provoked too much comment, too much attention. Deet could come, because Commissioner Chen wouldn't care that much what she did—he never takes spouses seriously, just one of the ways he proves himself to be a fool."

"But Hari always meant for you to be one of us," said Deet. "His worst fear was that you'd go off half-cocked and force your way into the First Foundation, when all along he wanted you in this one. The Second Foundation."

Leyel remembered his last interview with Hari. He tried to remember—did Hari ever lie to him? He told him that Deet couldn't go to Terminus—but now that took on a completely different meaning. The old fox! He never lied at all, but he never told the truth, either.

Zay went on. "It was tricky, striking the right balance, encouraging you to provoke Chen just enough that he'd strip away your fortune and then forget you, but not so much that he'd have you imprisoned or killed."

"You were making that happen?"

"No, no, Leyel. It was going to happen anyway, because you're who you are and Chen is who he is. But there was a range of possibility, somewhere between having you and Deet tortured to death on the one hand, and on the other hand having you and Rom conspire to assassinate Chen and take control of the Empire. Either of those extremes would have made it impossible for you to be part of the Second Foundation. Hari was convinced—and so is Deet, and so am I—that you belong with us. Not dead. Not in politics. Here."

It was outrageous, that they should make such choices for him, without telling him. How could Deet have kept it secret all this time? And yet they were so obviously correct. If Hari had told him about this Second Foundation, Leyel would have been eager, proud to join it. Yet Leyel couldn't have been told, couldn't have joined them until Chen no longer perceived him as a threat.

"What makes you think Chen will ever forget me?"

"Oh, he's forgotten you, all right. In fact, I'd guess that by tonight he'll have forgotten everything he ever knew."

"What do you mean?"

"How do you think we've dared to speak so openly today, after keeping silence for so long? After all, we aren't in Indexing now."

Leyel felt a thrill of fear run through him. "They can hear us?"

"If they were listening. At the moment, though, the Pubs are very busy helping Rom Divart solidify his control of the Commission of Public Safety. And if Chen hasn't been taken to the radiation chamber, he soon will be."

Leyel couldn't help himself. The news was too glorious—he sprang up from his bed, almost danced at the news. "Rom 's doing it! After all these years—overthrowing the old spider!"

"It's more important than mere justice or revenge," said Zay. "We're absolutely certain that a significant number of governors and prefects and military commanders will refuse to recognize the

overlordship of the Commission of Public Safety. It will take Rom Divart the rest of his life just to put down the most dangerous of the rebels. In order to concentrate his forces on the great rebels and pretenders close to Trantor, he'll grant an unprecedented degree of independence to many, many worlds on the periphery. To all intents and purposes, those outer worlds will no longer be part of the Empire. Imperial authority will not touch them, and their taxes will no longer flow inward to Trantor. The Empire is no longer Galactic. The death of Commissioner Chen—today—will mark the beginning of the fall of the Galactic Empire, though no one but us will notice what it means for decades, even centuries to come."

"So soon after Hari's death. Already his predictions are coming true. "

"Oh, it isn't just coincidence, " said Zay. "One of our agents was able to influence Chen just enough to ensure that he sent Rom Divart in person to strip you of your fortune. That was what pushed Rom over the edge and made him carry out this coup. Chen would have fallen or died—sometime in the next year and a half no matter what we did. But I'll admit we took a certain pleasure in using Hari's death as a trigger to bring him down a little early, and under circumstances that allowed us to bring you into the library. "

"We also used it as a test," said Deet. "We're trying to find ways of influencing individuals without their knowing it. It's still very crude and haphazard, but in this case we were able to influence Chen with great success. We had to do it—your life was at stake, and so was the chance of your joining us."

"I feel like a puppet," said Leyel.

"Chen was the puppet," said Zay. "You were the prize. "

"That's all nonsense," said Deet. "Hari loved you. *I* love you. You're a great man. The Second Foundation had to have you. And everything you've said and stood for all your life made it clear that you were hungry to be part of our work. Aren't you?"

"Yes," said Leyel. Then he laughed. "The index!"

"What's so funny?" asked Zay, looking a little miffed. "We worked very hard on it."

"And it was wonderful, transforming, hypnotic. To take all these people and put them together as if they were a single mind, far wiser in its intuition than anyone could ever be alone. The most intensely unified, the most powerful human community that's ever existed. If it's our capacity for storytelling that makes us human, then perhaps our capacity for indexing will make us something better than human."

Deet patted Zay's hand. "Pay no attention to him, Zay. This is clearly the mad enthusiasm of a proselyte."

Zay raised an eyebrow. "*I'm* still waiting for him to explain why the index made him *laugh*. "

Leyel obliged her. "Because all the time, I kept thinking—how could librarians have done this? Mere librarians! And now I discover that these librarians are all of Hari Seldon's prize students. My questions were indexed by psychohistorians!"

"Not exclusively. Most of us *are* librarians. Or machinists, or custodians, or whatever—the psychologists and psychohistorians are rather a thin current in the stream of the library. At first they were seen as outsiders. Researchers. *Users* of the library, not members of it. That's what Deet's work has been for these last few years—trying to bind us all together into one community. She came here as a researcher too, remember? Yet now she has made everyone's allegiance to the library more important than any other loyalty. It's working beautifully too, Leyel, you'll see. Deet is a marvel."

"We're *all* creating it together," said Deet. "It helps that the couple of hundred people I'm trying to bring in are so knowledgeable and understanding of the human mind. They understand exactly what I'm doing and then try to help me make it work. And it *isn't* fully successful yet. As years go by, we have to see the psychology group teaching and accepting the children of librarians and machinists and medical officers, in full equality with their own, so that the psychologists don't become a ruling caste. And then intermarriage between the groups. Maybe in a hundred years we'll have a truly cohesive community. This is a democratic city-state we're building, not an academic department or a social club."

Leyel was off on his own tangent. It was almost unbearable for him to realize that there were

hundreds of people who knew Hari's work, while Leyel didn't. "You have to teach me!" Leyel said. "Everything that Hari taught you, all the things that have been kept from me—"

"Oh, eventually, Leyel," said Zay. "At present, though, we're much more interested in what you have to teach *us*. Already, I'm sure, a transcription of the things you said when you first woke up is being spread through the library."

"It was recorded?" asked Leyel.

"We didn't know if you were going to go catatonic on us at any moment, Leyel. You have no idea how you've been worrying us. Of course we recorded it—they might have been your last words."

"They won't be. I don't feel tired at all."

"Then you're not as bright as we thought. Your body is dangerously weak. You've been abusing yourself terribly. You're not a young man, and we insist that you stay away from your lector for a couple of days. "

"What, are you now my doctor?"

"Leyel," Deet said, touching him on his shoulder the way she always did when he needed calming. "You *have* been examined by doctors. And you've got to realize—Zay is First Speaker. "

"Does that mean she's commander?"

"This isn't the Empire," said Zay, "and I'm not Chen. All that it means to be First Speaker is that I speak first when we meet together. And then, at the end, I bring together all that has been said and express the consensus of the group. "

"That's right," said Deet. "*Everybody* thinks you ought to rest."

"*Everybody* knows about me?" asked Leyel.

"Of course," said Zay. "With Hari dead you're the most original thinker we have. Our work needs you. Naturally we care about you. Besides, Deet loves you so much, and we love *Deer* so much, we feel like we're all a little bit in love with you ourselves."

She laughed, and so did Leyel, and so did Deet. Leyel noticed, though, that when he asked whether they all *knew* of him, she had answered that they cared about him and loved him. Only when Zay said this did he realize that she had answered the question he really meant to ask.

"And while you're recuperating," Zay continued, "Indexing will have a go at your new theory—"

"Not a theory, just a proposal, just a *thought*—"

"—*and a few psychohistorians will see whether it can be quantified, perhaps by some variation on the formulas we've been using with Deet's laws of community development. Maybe we can turn origin studies into a real science yet.*"

"Maybe," Leyel said.

"Feel all right about this?" asked Zay.

"I'm not sure. Mostly. I'm very excited, but I'm also a little angry at how I've been left out, but mostly I'm—I'm so relieved."

"Good. You're in a hopeless muddle. You'll do your best work if we can keep you off balance forever." With that, Zay led him back to the bed, helped him lie down, and then left the room.

Alone with Deet, Leyel had nothing to say. He just held her hand and looked up into her face, his heart too full to say anything with words. All the news about Hari's byzantine plans and a Second Foundation full of psychohistorians and Rom Divart taking over the government—that receded into the background. What mattered was this: Deet's hand in his, her eyes looking into his, and her heart, her self, her soul so closely bound to his that he couldn't tell and didn't care where he left off and she began.

How could he ever have imagined that she was leaving him? They had created each other through all these years of marriage. Deet was the most splendid accomplishment of his life, and he was the most valued creation of hers. We are each other's parent, each other's child. We might accomplish great works that will live on in this other community, the library, the Second Foundation. But the greatest work of all is the one that will die with us, the one that no one else will ever know of, because they remain

perpetually outside. We can't even explain it to them. They don't have the language to understand us.
We cat) only speak it to each other.