

## DIRTY SQUATTERS

"Not yet. I have to make contact first." Gazing at Micky with a solemnity that she hadn't exhibited before, the girl at last said, "I better." "Is she a friend of yours?" Kath inquired. "If your intention was to provoke an offensive response from the Chironians as a justification for enforcing order, then that hasn't worked either," Kalens returned coolly. "Now we must live with the damage and consider our alternatives." bastard. Mom drew the type . . . not all of them, but more than one ... and they could always smell the. "Listen, kid, you can't come around here, doing your dangerous-young-mutant act, worming your. "I don't cheat." Gen's sly look was worthy of a Mafia accountant testifying before a congressional. "Photographs," Micky said. "Pictures of you and Luki. That would be proof he wasn't just your. Bernard frowned uncomprehendingly. "Yes , . Why. Curiously, here in the gloom with her nose to the crack in the door, Old Yeller still wags her tail. She. you a tale of woe that might wring pity even from the chicken she's eating, were the poor fowl still alive!. kind to imagine such a thing." .to wondering about. Twenty years later, I saw another dog act, and I realized that in the meantime life. "Make for the bridge and wait there," Colman told her. "I'll send one of the guys into Franklin with a message for Kath and have her arrange for Casey or someone to be there. SD patrols could be prowling around, or anything. Best not to risk it." Veronica nodded her assent. "I heard a woman in the market who said that dead people talk to her," Susie told him. "That's even more ridiculous." Hesitantly, he eases open the driver's door and slips out of the SUV. onto the bed of the transport. "You're a better person than any of them." Whether already airborne or not, it will be coming. Soon. And if the craft itself doesn't possess the latest. Finally, Micky said, "If you want to establish yourself as an eccentric around this place, you've got your. "I'm Francene, named after the ZZ Top song." Then Colman's communicator started bleeping. Bernard Fallows was calling from the Communications Center. "I guess you did it," he said. "But it's not over yet. We've found out where Sterm is." "What about me?" Ci asked, hooking at Driscoll. She leaned to one side to let her mother see the hand she was holding. "In fact," Leilani continued, "old Sinsemilla? that's my mother? is a little nuts, period." At the windows of the two-story motel, most of the drapes have been flung back. Curious, worried. more than just a pathetic cripple. That's old Sinsemilla at the peak of her motherly concern. But she says. "So why bother?" Jay asked. "What's it to you if somebody else's house needs painting or not?" .rarity.. Chevrolet Camaro that whiffed and wheezed worse than a pneumonic horse, and a past that wound. you can throw them away, little mouse. Only you." "Sinsemilla? That's a ..." .the street, head raised as though he were admiring the palette of the twilight sky.. immensity, can't restrain them by word alone.. "Hell, Dorothy, where you are, they shoot little dogs like Toto for sport. And girls like you are stomped. Colman slowed and rubbed his chin. He wasn't in the mood. "You go on, Bret," he said. "I think I'm just gonna wander around. I guess rd rather he on my own for a while." An SD sergeant interrupted from behind Lesley. "They're here sir. Carriers coming through the lock." They looked round to find the first vehicles crammed with troops, many of them in suits, and weaponry slowing down as they passed through the space between the lock doors, and then speeding up again without stopping as they were waved on through. More followed, their occupants looking formidable and determined, and Lesley gave orders for them to be directed between the remaining three feeder ramps to get close to the Battle Module at all four of its access points. They entered the cafeteria, which was fairly busy since it was around midday, and sat by a window overlooking a parking area for flyers, beyond which lay a highway flanking the near bank of the river. A screen at one end of the table provided an illustrated menu and a recitation of the chefs recommendations for the day, and Juanita dictated their orders to it. At the next booth, a wheeled robot that had been delivering dishes from the heated compartment that formed its uppermost section closed its serving door and rolled away. "What are you doing?" The bedroom is too small and too utilitarian for decorative bowls or for knickknacks that might be of. something more desperate than hope, by a faith that sometimes seemed foolish to him but that he never. The debate continued for some time, but Wellesley was still the Mission Direct6r and final authority, and in the end his views prevailed. "I'll go along with you, but I have to say I'm not happy about it," Borftein said. "A lot of them might be still kids, but there are nearly ten thousand first-generation and something like thirty thousand in all who have reached or are past their late teens--more than enough adults capable of causing trouble. We still need contingency plans based on our having to assume an active initiative." "Sure. What could be crazier than the Army?" "I might have guessed," Colman said, nodding to him-. brace. "Having a great metabolism is nothing to be ashamed about. It's not like laziness or anything." Geneva leaned forward on the edge of the bed, shoulders hunched, as though she were on a pew,. seen movies about serial killers. These human monsters collect souvenirs of their kills. Some keep. you? some political nut? I thought you were just a sad-ass gumshoe grubbing a few bucks by peeping in. "Fifty-fifty," Colman answered. "It would have been ~zero the other way." Gripping the pole in her right hand as if it were a shepherd's staff, she used it to help maintain her balance. A good point, Iay admitted to himself. "Security\_ ' he tried. "To get rich... Whatever." "What little orange lady would that be?" Noah asked.. be, but who may also be Death with facial hair, says, "Curtis Hammond. That's a powerfully peculiar. Face to glass, nose flattened a millimeter short of fracture, he peers into the car as if into an aquarium. corner formed by banks of tall cabinets. The kitchen worker is apparently paralyzed by panic.. she was caught in a trap nobody could pry open for her, that to have any hope of escape, she must chew. "We feel we owe something, and we want to pay our way," Driscoll confirmed. "We don't want any free rides, but all we get are pieces of paper that aren't any good for anything here. What can you do? The Chironians traded in respect, Colman was beginning to understand as he listened to the talk around him. They respected knowledge and expertise in every form, and they showed it. Perhaps, he thought to himself, that was bow the first generation had sought to compete and to attain identity in their machine-managed environment, where such things as

parental status, social standing, wealth, and heritage had had no meaning. And they had preserved that ever since in the way their culture had evolved. "Pretty good. I've got the boiler tested and installed, and the axle linkages are ready to assemble. Right now I'm trying to get the slide valves to the high-pressure pistons right. They're tricky." Finally, he starts up toward the second floor. The stairs softly protest. As he ascends, he stays close to. "At least I didn't catch you playing with yourself. Let's get out of here." that you'll come through all right, as well as an immeasurably higher likelihood that you'll be able to look. A fly line of panic casts a hook into the boy's heart, and he clutches the edge of the counter to avoid. With an effort, the SD major bared his teeth and stretched his lips back almost to his ears. "Excuse me, sir, ' but do you have a few minutes you could spare?" hurtling truck slams into the pumps and sheers them off as though they were fence pickets, the explosions be handled like an ordinary case, and she wouldn't be given that opportunity. lights, this vehicle stands with engine idling, grumbling softly like some hulking beast that has been ridden. icals are among its major products, as well as electricity." "Who operates it?" Marcia Quarrey asked. From his hiding place in the Explorer on the lower deck of the car transport, he watches as purposeful. Gen ... or was she Kim Novak?" "I knew they were faithless, shiftless," Geneva continued. "We ought to pass the word to the media for a more appropriate treatment from now on as well," Kalens said. "Perhaps playing up things like Chironian stubbornness and irresponsibility would harden up the public image a bit... just in case. We could get them to add a mention or two of signs that the Chironians might have armed themselves and the need to take precautions. It could always be dismissed later as overzealous reporting. Should I whisper in Lewis's ear about it?" "Well, of course it does, sweetheart. What would the world be like without toilets?" and perhaps irrational notion. He's just a boy of comparatively little experience, and she's a grand person. In the rear passenger lounge of the shuttle being prepared for lift-off in Bay 5 at Canaveral base, Veronica sat nursing a large martini and quietly studying the pattern of activity around her and her escorts. It was just about at its peak, with passengers boarding at a steady rate and flight crew moving fore and aft continually. But most of the faces had not yet had time to register. The matron had evidently not considered it part of her duties to assist in packing or carrying anything, but had maintained her distance. Noah pressed STOP on the remote control. "There's only more of the same." He took the videotape. statistical variety that might present her with a winning lottery ticket. "I will indeed. See you later." Hanlon left, and they heard him forming up the relief guard outside. None of those movies or books has introduced him to a homicidal psychopath who collects teeth still. "I've never been much good at relationships . . . but I'm willing to try." fetal position. Wordless throughout her brother's monologue, she remained mute now. to dart beneath the surface of their conversation, though it eluded her net. She had to escape from the snake. Get to her bedroom. Try to barricade that door against her mother's. as if satisfied that everything was now clear. It wasn't. "Why? What happens with them?" Bernard asked. Nanook hesitated for a moment as if reluctant to risk being offensive by explaining the obvious. He shrugged. "Well . . . usually somebody ends up shooting them," he replied. "So it never gets to be .a real problem." "I'm not sure I'd trust any electronics," Lechat cautioned, "Could be risky," Bernard agreed after a second's reflection. "If Stern and whoever else is involved have been preparing for this, I wouldn't put it past them to have taps and call-monitor programs anywhere. Someone will have to go there." Colman nodded. "I guess so. I'll probably be asleep when you come off duty. Better give me a call." smoothing your hair, quell your fear with a cuddle and a kiss on the brow. baroque detail was not a fabrication, then what of the murderous stepfather, Dr. Doom, and his eleven. As now, however, she sometimes showered without removing the brace. Afterward, she'd have to towel. first encounter with the self-proclaimed dangerous mutant, Leilani had said several peculiar things. Now. "Good pup," he tells Old Yeller, meaning to encourage her and prepare her for what might be coming. Adam waved an arm resignedly. "Okay, okay. Never mind the sackcloth-and-ashes act. How about cleaning it up?" "No," the boy answered after a moment's reflection. "I could say fairies make the flowers up there grow, but the fact that the flowers are growing wouldn't prove that the fairies exist, would it?" toilets strikes him as hilarious, and the combined flow demand causes plumbing to rattle in the walls. "Better than tofu and canned peaches on a bed of bean sprouts," Leilani said as she settled in a chair. it wasn't a good atmosphere. "I need more than a few right now. How much did your Navigator cost?" Noah asked. it became an astringent syrup as it went down. Her aunt, from whom fate had stolen everything except a reliable sense of humor, referred to the yard as. But he's only ten years old, without family and friends, alone and afraid and lost. "Okay, then the lowly paramecium," Leilani said, shouldering past Micky to the sink. someday? assuming he ever gets out of the state alive? to make restitution for this and for the hot dogs. self-destruct through addiction. Leilani could detect that dangerous inclination more reliably than the most. He half expects to hear the teeth chattering in the drawer, determinedly gnawing their way out. He has. that proclaims LOVE IS THE ANSWER, with his jolly freckled face, this man doesn't appear to be a. "That's right." Bernard was surprised and felt a little flattered. "I help look after the main drive systems." The others watched as he pulled the unit out, accepting the call with a flip of his thumb, Judge Fulmire peered from the miniature screen. "Are you alone, Paul?" Fulmire asked without preamble. His voice was clipped and terse. brethren deal with the cowboys and secure the restaurant, they will hear about the kid who was the. time, a boy who will find his way and come to terms with his losses, a boy who will not only live but also. at the shuttle base. Orders have come down from the ship to move the Chironians ot4t and seal off the whole place. Major Thorp's there with part of A company, and he's refusing to take SD orders. We've been ordered to send two platoons. Sirocco wants Hanlon to go with them, and you to secure the block in case there's any shooting and it spreads here." Micky reached for her aunt's hand. "I loved him, too, Aunt Gen." "Okay, maybe not." A dry sour laugh escaped her as she said, "But I sure have done my best to wash it. much sun." course, she might be flashing back to some tender moment she believed that she'd shared with Clark. "Then why not do something else?" she asked.

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