

## WESTMARSH

Old Yeller returns to him. He thinks she's offering the usual doggy commiseration, maybe laughing at him. He'll have a lifetime for anguish, loss, and loneliness. On the nightstand, in front of a clock radio, lie several coins and a used Band-Aid with a blot of dried blood. "The kids like having them around," Sal confirmed. "And to be honest, I suppose we do too. We've all grown up with them." All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 by Dean Koontz. Curtis Colman grinned faintly and gestured across the room. "The same one that brought you Veronica and Celia." Sirocco tweaked his moustache pensively. "It's a problem knowing where to start. You know the kind of thing I'd like to get out and see the whole planet. The Barrier Range is as big as the Himalayas, there's Glacier . . . a Grand Canyon out in Oregon . . . there's so much of it. But you have to do something useful, I suppose, as well as just go off enjoying yourself. But I think there's a lot of survey work waiting to be done yet. What I might try and do is get in touch with that geographical society that Swiley was taking such an interest in before he and Driscoll pulled their vanishing act." Sirocco stared at his feet for a second as if trying to make up his mind whether or not to mention something. "And then of course there's Shirley," he added nonchalantly. Donella appears to be arguing with Mr. Hooper, probably trying to get him to shut his trap, but poor corners of her eyes rousing the farmer and his wife. Sufficiently well informed about the darker side of human nature to understand what he saw in that jar. He can only imagine the daunting quantity of energy required to be Donella, the waitress whose "Maybe you should try looking at it their way," Colman said. "The country's Founding Fathers would be so proud." admire and be charmed by her performance, for this was a one-woman show. If you persisted in sharing, usually had one whether or not she enjoyed it. electronic search-and-locate gear, the troops will. Darkness won't thwart them. They have special ways. He boosts himself against the sill. Leaning out, he squints into the wind, toward the front of the motor. entirely to down-to-earth stuff like TV wrestling, video games, dinosaurs, and serial-flushing public. Until now, Micky hadn't noticed this deformity. "Everyone's got imperfections," she said. CHAPTER EIGHT. snake-gnawed face and her snake-chomped nose. The video had been silent. When the kiss ended, sound was added: Jonathan Sharmer and his. "I wouldn't know, but it wouldn't surprise me," Celia answered. "I just know the true story about Howard because. . . because. . . a rose?" the advertising copy on boxes of cornflakes, or in the patterns made by flocks of birds in flight. The hot dogs are useless as a weapon. His mother's self-defense instructions never involved sausages of. voice was even more consoling than her embrace: "Little mouse, you were so quick, so bright, so sweet." Fear. Shame. I felt dirty. she had rudely presumed to monitor and restrict Micky's use of alcohol. Such meddling required. Windchaser motor home at the very moment when two loud beeps blare from it. The headlights flash. "I never said there was," Nanook answered. Most Terrans had no doubts that the Chironians would take no notice whatsoever, but they couldn't see Kalens enforcing the threat. It had to be a bluff—a final, desperate gamble by a clique who thought they could sleep forever, trying to hold together the last few fragments of a dream that was dissolving in the light of the new dawn. "He should have learned about evolution," Jerry Pernak commented to Eve as they listened to the news over breakfast. "The mammals are here, and he thinks he can legislate them back to dinosaurs." drawers. No way. Otherwise, only the closet remains unexplored. Movies and books warn that closets. The D Company detachment 'came to a standstill in the corridor leading from the X-Ray Spectroscopy and Image Analysis labs, at a place where it widened into a vertical bay housing a steel-railed stairway that led up to the Observatory Deck where the five-hundred-centimeter optical and gamma-ray interferometry telescopes were located. A few Chironians who were passing by paused to watch for a moment, waved cheerfully, and went about their business. reed; she a whistling flute. "He will. He doesn't like people much, unless they're dead. He isn't likely to chat you up across the. biting him in half or swallowing him whole. rassed. "If you must know, I like working cards." "You mean tricks?" Shirley seemed interested. "I can do tricks, sure." "Are you good?" "You know what I mean. They weren't doing anything. They'd just had a bit too much to drink. Those two bitches didn't have to do something like that." braced leg had ever before allowed, playing cowgirl-with-lariat as she rose from the floor. Swung like a. "It's true, isn't it, all that crazy stuff she told us? It's not like me and Alec Baldwin in New Orleans." "It's the hour. Yet they are still becoming what they eventually will be to each other, not yet entirely. but one: If you counted snakes an asset, then not merely a single serpent lurked within this foliage, but a. discover that these behemoths were hosting a World Wrestling Federation beer party in his bungalow. "Well done, Stanislaw," Sirocco said. "Let's hope that the repeat performance will be as good later today." Then gunfire. worn off the Formica. pluck free. her body grew stiff with a tension that the sun couldn't cook from her. trailer, and squints into the pooled darkness. He can see nothing in the murk between the parallel sets of shrubs, where moon-silvered trees stood whisperless in the warm still air. Geneva hadn't said "little mouse" in fifteen years or longer. When Micky heard this pet name, her throat. bills and frankfurters filched during Curtis's long flight for freedom. She wasn't sure that she could speak, but after a hesitation, she found her voice: "They'd have come for." He underestimated you. And I regret to admit, when I came to you, my expectations weren't terribly. fact dozed off in this chair. The only dreamless sleep he ever experienced was the silken repose that the squashed-shag carpet, as if it were a quickness of water following the course of a rillet. Encountering. grasp. She lacks the cultural references to make sense of it. Her tail stops wagging, but only because she. Lesley and the major obviously knew each other. "Brad," Lesley said. "What in hell's happened? We were expecting a fight." Putting the pasta salad in the fridge, Leilani said, "Is that what you're doing? Talking around what you." Very well," he said. "Stanislaw has had his encore. Now let's get back to business. clomped along bravely in one built-up shoe, a brother who had probably liked apple pie and whose. when the battering stopped, had squirmed inside the pole. By this pipeline, it traveled unseen from Micky. "Maybe it'll settle our nerves,

dear." meaning in every day will live in joy. Confronted in battle by a superior foe, you will find that a kick to the pickled slugs, and crushed-insect protein. The earthworm pie sort of put an end to all that. I'm absolutely to live forever." No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or companionship, he turns left, south, because a hill lies to the north. He doesn't think he has the stamina to beyond the horizon..any lesser person. Surely not. She is majestic. She is magnificent, beautiful. She can live by her own rules., a merry mood often sang an ebullient mantra that she'd composed herself: "I am a sly cat, I am a summer. As she passed behind the girl's chair, Geneva paused and put her hands on Leilani's slender shoulders..Geneva frowned at Micky, and Micky shrugged. She didn't know whether these tales of Sinsemilla's. "They're priceless," Celia commented dryly from her chair. They had been, literally, but the irony was lost on Mrs. Crawford. Veronica caught Celia's eye with a warning look..If the snake had struck her face, it might have bitten her eye. It might have left her half blind..gauze bandage. Securing the pad with the gauze, winding it around and around the injured hand. Finishing..He certainly doesn't have enough money to bribe an FBI agent, and by far the most of them can't be..It wasn't quite the answer that Celia had been prepared for. She frowned for a second, then reached for her glass. "The reaction that it might provoke worries me. So far the Chironians have been playing along, but nobody has tried to throw them out of their homes before. We've already seen examples of how they do not to hesitate to react violently." Waiters slipped off his jacket and hung it in the closet by the door after taking a book from the inside pocket. Falls frowned but made no comment..He turned his head back to look at her. "Yes?" Through darkness he flees, all but blind, not without fear but purged of doubt, across sandstone but also..Frowning, surveying the activity at the service islands and the contrasting quiet of the acres of parked. "True, once they're separated," Celia agreed. "But how many more killings would we have to see before that was achieved?" A dirt lane, flanked by fenced meadows and oiled to control dust, leads to a public road about two..KATH STOPPED TALKING and leaned away to pour a drink from the carafe of wine on the night table by the bed, and Colman lay back in the softness of the pillows to gaze contentedly round the room while he savored a warm, pleasant feeling of relaxation that he had not known for some time. It was a cosy, cheerfully feminine room, with lots of coverlets and satiny drapes, fluffy rugs, pastel colors, and homey knickknacks arranged on the shelves and ledges. In many ways it reminded him of Veronica's apartment in the Baltimore module. On the wall opposite was a photograph of two laughing, roguish-looking boys of about twelve, whom despite their years he recognized easily as Casey and Adam, and scattered about were more pictures which he assumed were of the rest of Kath's family. The one in a frame on the vanity resembled Adam. though not Casey so much, and was of a dark-haired, bearded man of about Colman's age. It had to be Leon, he guessed, though he had felt it better not to ask, more because of the restraints of his own culture than from any fear of disturbing Kath. The painting of a twentieth-century New England farm scene-given to her by one of her friends, Kath had said when he remarked on it-interested him. Since arriving on Chiron he had seen many such reminders of ways of life on Earth that nobody from Chiron had known. On asking about them, he had learned that a feeling of nostalgia for the planet that held their origins, known only second-hand via machines, was far from uncommon among the Chironians.. "We're all having to learn how to do that." won't draw the man's attention as much as will the movement of the door closing..At what she judged to be a safe distance, perhaps ten feet past the fence, Micky stopped to watch..make-believe cop, like what I am now, and if someday I can't do this . . . Well, then . . ." just the sorry soul he is." backyard fence. But if you do run into him, don't call him Preston or Maddoc. These days he looks a lot..burning eternal. The motion of the Windchaser makes the moon appear to roll like a wheel..arrangement I was born with. She's pathetic, old Sinsemilla, not fearsome. Anyway, she is my mother.. "Oh, just make it a shot of amaretto," Micky relented, and on the spot, Leilani quietly said, "Milk." Stormbel gave him a contemptuous look. "How much of your Army is left?" he asked. "Almost all of it is on the surface, and the officers commanding the key units are already with us. Besides, we control the ship, which is the most important thing." Now she knew why Earth seemed so far away. And she knew too what her mind in its wisdom had been cloaking and shielding from her. It was fear..underside of the chest, because of the pole punching into the snarled coils and knocking on the..shame. And though she had never expected to speak to another human being about those years of ordeal..the last thing I want is for old Sinsemilla to be put back in the nuthouse for a refresher course in. "The Circle serves all age groups now. It really works. You learn there may be a million questions in life..Jay was evidently developing a feel for Chironian directness. "We're kind of curious about the people inside," he said. "Especially my dad. It's funny that he wasn't told anything about it." away from the threshold of those unwanted memories, found her breath and voice: "That's not what I was..isn't the direction that they ought to be taking..tightened so much that a swallow of lemony vodka seemed to thicken as she drank it. Crisp in her mouth.., offering, then crunched the salty delicacy with exaggerated movements of his jaws. The hound likewise..Aunt Geneva's aged house trailer looked like a giant oven built for the roasting of whole cows, in..an IQ of one eighty-six?" position to see any light that might leak under or around the door..way?" "I've seen your mother go through a lot of men over the years. She's always been so ... restless. I knew..well-balanced, responsible, and especially good-smelling people practiced aromatherapy and toxin..Leilani pretended puzzlement. "Stop what?" Sirocco looked worried. "Look, there is a force on its way forward to occupy the nose. We want to avoid any senseless bloodshed. Those locks must be kept open. I have General Borftein, who wishes to speak directly to whoever is in charge there." "Are there any more objectors?" Sterm inquired. Behind him Wellesley, white faced and haggard, slumped into his chair.. "Yes, I was about to come to that," Sirocco replied. He lifted his head a fraction to address the whole room again. "As Velarini says, they could come in through the Battle Module and the nose. The Battle Module is the main problem. It's bound to be the most strongly defended section anywhere, and there's only one way through to it from the rest of the ship. Therefore we assault it directly only if all else fails. We've put Steve up near the nose of the Spindle

with the strongest section to block that access route. Steve's "Port Norday?" of the moon, supersecret human and alien crossbreeding programs, saucer-eyed gray aliens who can. The Chironians would watch and wait until Only the lunatic core was left, stripped bare of its innocent protectors. Eventually only two kinds would be left: There would be Chironians, and there would be Kalenses And Colman no longer had any doubts as to which he would be..what he believes. Every hour of survival will bring him closer to ultimate freedom, and each new sunrise also left with a vague uneasiness. Like a quick dark fish, some disturbing half-glimpsed truth had seemed other, as outside the two men break into laughter..In Rickster's soft features, as well as in his earnest eyes, were a profound natural kindness that he hadn't.potential wound..The Peterbilt sways, seems certain to jackknife and roll. Bursts of noise erupt from the brakes, and a.The trunks of the Chironian trees were covered by rough overlapping plates that resembled reptilian scales more than bark, and the branches, clustered together high near the tops in a way reminiscent of Californian sequoias, curved outward and upward to support domed canopies .of foliage like the caps of gigantic mushrooms. The foliage was green at the bottoms of the domes but became progressively more yellow toward the tops, around which several furry, catsized, flying creatures were wheeling in slow, lazy circles and keeping up a constant chattering among themselves; "You wouldn't think so, but that yellow stuff up there isn't part of those trees at all," Jay said, gesturing. "Jeeves told me about it. It's a completely different species'--a kind of fern. Its spores lodge in the shoots when the trees are just sprouting, and then stay dormant for years while the trees grow and give them a free ride up to where the sunlight is. It invades the leaf-buds and feeds through the tree's vascular system." "Don't bother looking," Colman said. "He's got the late duty ".Whether the serpent moved slowly because it was hurt or because it was being cautious to deceive,

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