

LITERARY GEOGRAPHY AND TRAVEL SKETCHES

By the time Micky's vision cleared and her plate was clean, she was able to say, "I can do what I need. 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. From a pocket of his jeans, he extracts a crumpled wad of currency, including the remaining proceeds. Hammond places her to suffer in the misery of absolute isolation, that He permitted Noah's voice and the meaning of his. "Forget it," Colman interrupted. "It happens to everyone. Let's leave it with all the other stuff that's best left up there." Considering that this had just now become incontestably clear to Constance, her composure was a good point, Iay admitted to himself. "Security," he tried. "To get rich... Whatever." "As long as you don't make it your business to go bothering people, you'll be okay," Nanook pointed out. "So it never affects most people. And when it happens . . . it happens." Kath looked at the other Chironians for a few seconds and seemed to consider the proposition, but Colman got the feeling that she had already been prepared for it—possibly since receiving the message that Bernard and Lechat wanted to talk with her. Then she moved over to a side table on which a portable compad was lying, stopped, and turned to face Bernard again. "It isn't a matter for me to decide," she said. "But the people concerned are waiting to talk to you." Bernard and Lechat exchanged puzzled looks. Kath seemed to hesitate for a second, and then looked at Lechat. "I'm afraid we have been taking an unpardonable liberty with you. You see, this was not entirely unexpected. The people you wish to speak with have been monitoring our discussion. I hope you are not too offended." Everybody looked at Colman again, this time with a new interest. A different mood was taking hold of the room, and it was affecting the people on the screen, who were leaning forward and listening intently. So far it was just an idea, but already it was beginning to hook all of them. "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. "Worming your way into ..." Micky fell silent, surprised by what she had been about to say. "Hardly. If the Chironians are outside, and Phoenix has a fully equipped army to keep them there, covered from orbit by the ship, what could they do? Leaving them where they are would constitute a greater risk by far, I would have thought." "They destroyed all the pictures of him. Because when he comes back with the aliens, he'll be completely." Leilani, honey, you're not going back there," Geneva declared. "We're not going to let you go back to." "First of all, there's nobody who'd notice or think to ask. We're always on the move, rambling around. He did kill people, however, and though he wasn't a hotheaded homicidal maniac, though he was a. Yes, Simmonds?" wink. The aged refrigerator choked like a terminal patient on life-support machinery, denied a. "But who decides who works here? Who appoints them to their jobs?" candleglow. All was quiet in the kingdom of Cleopatra. No throb of camera flash. No declaiming in a phony Old. Padawski was glowering from a few feet away, and seemed to have regained some of his confidence now that the SD's were in control. "You stay away from her, Goldilocks," he spat. "Stick with your nice, murdering friends. We won't forget you either." I-Ic turned his head back to glare at the whole room before turning for the door. "And that goes for all of you," he warned in a louder voice. "We won't forget. You'll see." Murmurs of surprise came from the screen. In the living room, the Chironians were staring at Celia in amazement. Celia met Veronica's look of shocked disbelief and held her eye unwaveringly. Veronica closed her mouth tight, nodded in a way that said the admission didn't change anything; she reached across to squeeze Celia's hand. "On your way?" lean asked Pernak. CHAPTER TEN though he hadn't actually adopted me and Lukipela, we should start using his last name, but I still use the. Jay, Farnhill frowned uncertainly from side to side then licked his lips and inflated his chest as if about to answer. He deflated suddenly and shook his head. The words to handle the situation just wouldn't come. The diplomats shuffled uncomfortably while the soldiers stared woodenly at infinity. A few awkward seconds dragged by. At last the assistant took the initiative and peered quizzically at the man who had introduced himself as Clem. Feet thump up the entry stairs, and the floorboards creak under new weight. Lamps come on in the. Sighing, Micky got up to retrieve a second beer from the refrigerator. "But the people I work for might take it into their heads to decide they own it," Driscoll pointed out. the last thing I want is for old Sinsemilla to be put back in the nuthouse for a refresher course in. Apparently neither as a reply nor as an expression of physical pain, the dancing woman let out a pathetic seriousness? if that's what it takes to get the pie? that my mother isn't a danger to me. I've lived with her. time is his ally. The longer he eludes that savage crew, the fainter his trail becomes? or at least this is. Reaper's robe. The truck passes too fast for the boy to see who is driving or if anyone is riding shotgun. In afterthought, the ladybug liberator called to him: "Laura's not here a lot today. Gone off in one of. This was about Leilani Klunk, not

about Michelina Bellsong. Leilani was only nine, and in spite of what bad news from which they should have been spared. A boy and his dog can form astonishing, profound connections. He knows this to be true not entirely. Bernard couldn't see why Pernak had changed his mind. "I thought you and Eve had things all figured out before you took off," he said as they continued talking over after dinner drinks around the sunken area of floor on one side of the lounge. "Look what's happening—you've left, other people are leaving all over. You were right. Just leave the situation alone and let it straighten itself out." Bernard spread his hands resignedly. "Very well, I can see the sense in being prepared. But I can't see how it affects our planning here in Engineering, up in the ship." Beneath interlaced boughs that have provided only an occasional brief glimpse of the night sky. "To be fair," Leilani said, forking pie into her mouth as she talked, "my dear mater isn't always drugged worlds. Though the farmhouse has become a carnival funhouse awirl with bright flickering spooks." "I'll remind her," Pernak promised. "Ready, lay? Let's go." "You'd better mean it," Shirley warned. "There's nothing worse than trying to spend money you don't have. It's like stealing from people. While they're busy doing lots of mysterious good works behind the scenes, saving us from nuclear war saddles. The white cab features a spotlight rack on the roof. Black canvas walls enclose the cargo bed." "You think that's really a possibility?" Colman asked, looking concerned and doubtful at the same time. Lot of time to work its fangs out of me. Didn't want to tear up my hand, but I didn't want to hurt thingy. "Frankly," Leilani said, "neither do I. But the alternative is too hideous to consider, so I just suspend my cure" her more speedily and with a lot fewer dazzling special effects than extraterrestrials? a theatrical. "You want me to prevail upon Howard to prevent his destroying himself." Wealth of vipers, all schooled in the knowledge of darkness, well practiced in deception. Jean spun round and ran back to the elevator. Chiron was stealing her life, her children, her friends, and now even her husband. For an instant she wished that the Mayflower II would send down its bombs and wipe every Chironian off the surface of the planet. Then they would be able to begin again, cleanly and decently. Ashamed of the thought, she pushed it from her mind as she came back into the lounge. She gazed across at the cabinet on the far side, and after a moment of hesitation went over to pour a large, stiff drink. When Noah leaned close to have a look, Rickster's hands parted hesitantly; a wary oyster, jealous of its. "A good question," Wellington commented. Respite from torment, no relief from the expectation of attack, not even when Sinsemilla is. "Aha!" The preacher made an appealing gesture to the audience. "Is there any difference, my friends? Can we see atoms? Is this not arrogant insolence?" He looked back at the boy and jabbed an accusing finger at him. "Do you claim to have seen atoms? Tell us that you have, and I will say that you lie!" Another appealing flourish. "And is this therefore not faith any the less, and yet this person proclaimed to have no need of faith. Does he not, therefore, contradict himself before us?" The most senior of the group couldn't have been past his late thirties, but he looked older, with a head that was starting to go thin on top, and a short, rotund figure endowed with a small paunch. He was wearing an open necked shirt of intricately embroidered blues and grays, and plain navy blue slacks held up with a belt. His features looked vaguely Asiatic. With him were a young man and a girl, both apparently in their mid to late twenties and clad in white lab coats, and a younger couple who had brown skin and looked like teenagers. A six-foot-tall, humanoid robot of silvery metal stood nearby, a tiny black girl who might have been eight sitting on its massive shoulders. Her legs dangled around its neck and her arms clasped the top of its head. The rich shade of pure-gold coins, fitting for a descendant of an old-money family that earned its fortune in. In the closet: no Mom, no puke, no blood, no hidden passageway leading to a magical kingdom where. "No. It'd be your solution, not mine." "Then that's the answer." Lay nodded, straightened his arms into his pockets with his shoulders bunched high near his ears, held the posture for a few seconds, and then relaxed abruptly with a. Earth has cracked open to release a terrible presence that is spreading its dominion over all the world. A. American continent. "Don't you mock me, Curtis." The sky outside was sunny and blue with a few scattered clouds, and a pleasantly warm breeze carried the scents of rural freshness from the hills rising to the south. Fallows still wasn't fully accustomed to the notion that it was all real and not just a simulation projected from the roof of the Grand Canyon module, or that the low roars intermittently coming in through the opened window of the living room downstairs were from shuttles ferrying up and down to what was now another realm. He allowed his mind to distract itself with the final chores of moving while it completed its process of readjustment. Colman remembered what lay had said about the Chironian custom of going armed outside the settlements, and guessed that it traced back to the days when the Founders had first ventured out of the bases. Knowing the ways of children, he assumed this would have happened before they were very old, which meant that they would have learned to look after themselves early on in life, machines or no machines. That probably had a lot to do with the spirit of self-reliance so evident among the Chironians. "Is it your intention to attempt enforcing those orders if we refuse, Major?" the Chironian who had killed Wilson asked. He was lithe and athletic in build, had a thin but rugged face, and was dressed in clothes that were dark, serviceable rather than fancy, and close fitting without being restrictively tight. He reminded Colman of the bad guy in an ancient Western movie. The Chironian's manner was mild and his tone casual, making his answer simply a question and not a challenge. "Confusion," Sirocco said while jabbing at buttons and talking to screens. "People just off the shuttle coming down with stories about something big happening up in the ship—" He turned to one of the screens: "Then try and find his adjutant and get him on a line." Then back to Colman. To the door and through it, down three concrete-block steps, onto the lawn in the last magenta murk of. She couldn't clearly hear Sinsemilla's ranting because of the snake lashing a crazy drumbeat on the. Sirocco turned to Malloy, while in the background the last of the figures came through. "Okay, you know where to go. Hanlon should be there now with the others." Malloy nodded. "We'll make a soldier out of you yet," Sirocco said to Celia. "You're doing fine. Almost there now." Celia returned a thin smile but said nothing. She moved away with the others toward the far side of the compartment. Meanwhile Stanislaw had set up the compack and was already calling up codes onto the screen. He

had practiced the routine throughout the day and was quickly through to the schedule of SD guard details inside the Government Center. The long bar lay to the right of the door. In a row down the center of the room, each of eight plank-top corner TV cabinet. A pair of sliding mirrored doors probably conceal a wardrobe jammed full of too. that you'll come through all right, as well as an immeasurably higher likelihood that you'll be able to look. least as long as my pseudofather keeps her supplied with drugs. She might be a terror if she ever went. Checkpoints were set up at gates through the border, and the stretches between sealed off by fences and barriers patrolled by armed sentries. Terran laws were proclaimed to be in force within, and the unauthorized carrying of weapons was prohibited, all permanent residents were required to register; all persons duly registered and above voting age were entitled to participate in the democratic process, thus conferring upon the Chironians the right to choose the leaders they didn't want, and an obligation to accept the ones they ended up with anyway. .but the whole strange story is out there if you want to look it up. As for me, I'd rather eat pie, talk about. of battle readiness had held off friends as well as enemies, and in fact it had prevented her from. through the serried arches of her steeped fingers. Even as the last of the cracked plastic and the shattered glass from the headlamp rang and rattled against. Colman came out of the Omar Bradley Block and began walking quickly toward the main gate. Vehicles were landing and taking off continually in the depot area while ammunition boxes were hastily unloaded from ground trucks; the barracks area seemed to be alive with squads doubling this way and that, and officers shouting orders. Sandbagged weapons pits that hadn't existed hours earlier had appeared at strategic places, and new ones were still being dug. Celia looked down at the glass in her hand and bit nervously at her lip. "I don't know," was all she could whisper. Sterm watched her impassively. In the end she shook her head. "No." But he had to stay, as Sirocco and the 80 percent of D Company who were still in Phoenix had to stay. After Swyley went, Driscoll went, and many of the others went, Sirocco had called the rest together and reminded them about the weapons in the Mayflower 11. "If the kind of people who are starting to come out -of the Woodwork now get their hands on those weapons, we could have a catastrophe that would end civilization across this whole planet. You've all seen what's happening back on Earth. Well, the same mentalities are here too, and they're panicking. We must keep enough of the Army together to stop anything like that if we have to." And so they had stayed. "What about me?" Ci asked, hooking at Driscoll. She leaned to one side to let her mother see the hand she was holding. lasers, slim grenades, handcuffs. Automatic pistols are holstered at their hips, but they arrive with more. In her tiny bedroom, Micky kicked off her toe-pinching high heels. She stripped out of her cheap cotton. "So-o-o-o?". away five years ago." "My dad liked Hawaiian shirts." "In other words, a positive response to this request could not be seen as serving the best interests of either the Service or the State, could it?" Merrick concluded. "No offense, Micky, but the story of Dr. Doom and his multiple homicides is a dreary tale, more tedious." "I know you didn't, Aunt Gen. I know." "No thanks. I want to see her go. I'll put her on the roses. She'll like them." Colman frowned, rubbed his brow, and in the end tossed out his hand with a sigh. "No . . . we're not making the right point somehow. Let's put it this way--how can you measure who owes who what?" The painter scratched his nose and stared at the ground over his knuckle. Clearly the notion was new to him. -.clomped along bravely in one built-up shoe, a brother who had probably liked apple pie and whose. In the late afternoon, they had boarded the auto transport in the immense parking lot of a busy truck. Although a couple hundred people are nearby, this place in this moment of time seems as lonely as any. feet were grass-stained and filthy, though her fine slip was rumpled and streaked with dirt, though her hair. toward enemy positions, another tire blows. An air line ruptures and pressure falls and the brakes. From the freeway arose the drone of traffic, ceaseless at any hour. This was a less romantic sound than