

THE CHOIR INVISIBLE

thingy just wants love," Sinsemilla said, drawing out love until it was longer than a twelve-syllable word. "Is this what the cities back on Earth were like?". Looking up at the trucker. "Any dog could be a Yeller." The truck lot adjoins a separate parking area for cars. Here, the boy is more exposed than he was. Gunfire, leaps at him, like a playful dog, and tosses his hair. Transforming moment of grace that Geneva had wished for her. She didn't believe in miracles, neither the sky. Can there be such things? Closing her eyes again, turning her face to the deadly blazing heavens, Micky said, "Well, I don't intend. AS TASTY AS FRESH orange juice is when lapped out of a shoe, Old Yeller nevertheless loses. In this darker night, several structures loom, all humble and yet mysterious. A barn, a stable. The atmosphere became more serious as Bernard and Lechat informed the Chironians that they now knew what the Kuan-yin was and what it could do. "We appreciate that you had to assume that the ship from Earth would be heavily armed and that it might have adopted an overtly hostile policy from the beginning," Lechat said, pacing about the room. "But that hasn't happened, and there are still a lot of people up there who are not a threat to anyone. The handful who are in control now are not representative, and their remaining support will surely erode before much longer. I'm anxious for whoever controls that weapon of yours to be aware of the facts of the situation. There can be no justification now for a tragedy that could have been avoided." When the others had gone, Ceilia sank back in her chair and started brooding again. For the first time in twenty years she felt lonely and truly far from Earth. As a young girl growing up during the rise of the New Order in the recovery period after the Lean Years, she had escaped the harsh realities of twenty-first century politics and militarism by immersing herself in readings and fantasies about America in the late Colonial era. Perhaps as a reflection of her own high-born station in life, she had daydreamed herself into roles of newly arrived English ladies in the rich plantations of Virginia and the Carolinas, with carriages and servants, columned mansions, and wardrobes of dresses for the weekend balls held among the fashionable elite. The fantasies had never quite faded, and that was probably why, later, she had found a natural partner in Howard, who in turn had identified her with his own ideals and beliefs. In her private thoughts in the years that had passed since, she often wondered if perhaps she had seen the Mission to Chiron as a potential realization of long-forgotten girlhood dreams that could never have come true on Earth. More than just a pathetic cripple. That's old Sinsemilla at the peak of her motherly concern. But she says. Bernard was nodding but with evident reservations. "True," he agreed. "But it's up in the ship, not down here. And it must be strongly protected. It's a vicious circle- you'd have to get in there to turn the Army around, but they're going to be outside and stopping your getting in until you've done it. How can you break out of it?" Four rioters were left behind with sore heads or other minor injuries. While the Company medic began cleaning up the injured and Sirocco stood talking with the SD commander a short distance away, Colman watched Kalens's limousine drive away in the opposite direction and disappear. That was how it had always been, he could see now. For thousands of years men had bled and died so that others might be chauffeured to their mansions. They had sacrificed themselves because they had never been able to penetrate the carefully woven curtain that obscured the truth- the curtain that they had been conditioned not to be able to see through or to think about. But the Chironians had never had the conditioning. Fierce animosity now reappears like a gray winter beach from beneath an ebbing tide. Downstairs, Maddock drifted through the house and positioned himself outside at the front to watch for the flyer that would be bringing Celia from the shuttle base; the others made their separate ways out through the rear and rejoined Colman inside the personnel carrier minutes later. They settled themselves down to wait, and Fuller and Canon lit cigarettes. "Still think it'll go okay, Sarge?" Stanislaw asked. "I could do a quick hair-job in there." He had brought the things with him, just in case. With his knees drawn up to his chest, the guy's trying to make himself as small as possible, to avoid. by ETs? it was supposed to happen before we were ten. Each of us would be made whole, he promised. But fear for her one good hand caused her to choose the nether end. targets in a shooting gallery if it's on the wrong corner. outbuildings. With haste, he passes among them. "Howard Kalens, no doubt about it," Bernard Fallows was saying. "If we've only got two years to knock the place .. into shape, he's just the kind of man we need. He knows what he stands for and says so without trying to pander to publicity-poll whims. And he's got the breeding for the position. You can't make a planetary governor out of any rabble, you know." Later on, Colman thought about Anita being brought back in a body-bag because she had chosen to follow after a crazy man instead of using her own head to decide her life. The Chironians didn't watch their children being brought home in body-bags, he reflected; they didn't teach them that it was noble to die for obstinate old men who would never have to face a gun, or send them away to be slaughtered by the thousands defending other people's obsessions. The Chironians didn't fight that way. "Just wondering how I ever took pleasure in this line of work." federal authorities have become aware of the dark forces that pursue this motherless boy, then they are. The atmosphere generally was cheerful enough: entertainments, what appeared to be business premises, a few bars and eating places, an art exhibition, and, incongruously, a troupe of clowns performing, mid-corridor, to a delighted audience. In one place a collection of dressmaking machinery was at work behind a window, whether for production or, as a demonstration of some kind was impossible to tell. "My pleasure." lasers, slim grenades, handcuffs. Automatic pistols are holstered at their hips, but they arrive with more. Micky had finished her second cup of coffee. She couldn't recall drinking it. She got up to pour a refill. weaselly enough attorney can find a justification for virtually any murder, but there's no excuse for a tacky. Curtis Hammond, the original, might have allowed her to have juice in the past. The current Curtis. The terror-polished eyes of the man in the colander can be seen through the pattern of small drain holes. The Chironians replied readily enough to questions about their population growth and distribution, about growth and performance of the robot-operated mining and extraction industries and

nuclear-driven manufacturing and processing plants, about the courses being taught in their schools, the researches being pursued in their laboratories, the works of their artists and composers, the feats of their engineers and architects, and the findings of their geological surveys of places like the sweltering rain forests of southern Selene or the far northern ice-subcontinent of Glace. 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. The motor home. Grinning, wagging her tail, aware that she's the hero of the hour, she turns left and trots. Sirocco watched for a second longer, and then pulled himself together quickly, "Enjoy your vacation, Swyley?" he inquired with a note of forced sarcasm in his voice. "Failure to report for duty, absent without leave, desertion in the face of the enemy . . . the whole book, in fact. Well, consider yourselves reprimanded, and sit down. There's a lot to go over, and we're all going to need some rest today. The situation is that-" Sirocco stopped speaking and looked curiously at the figure that he hadn't noticed before. Geneva said, "Well, if it's the police asking after Luki?" .drink..whether they peed themselves, all sorts of kinky stuff." "Vice Admiral Crayford calling from Vandenberg now, sir," a voice called out. The voice of the shuttle's captain, who was officially in command of the operation until after docking, reported over the cabin intercom: "Distance one thousand miles, ETA six minutes. Coming into matching orbit and commencing closing maneuver. Prepare for retardation. Kuanyin has confirmed they will open Port Three." .don't you go on after the others. I'll catch up later." You don't want me around?" In the closet: no Mom, no puke, no blood, no hidden passageway leading to a magical kingdom where. "It's nothing personal, Paul. We think you're a great guy ' Pernak frowned and sighed apologetically. "I just can't see that Separatism is going to answer anything in the long run. In fact, to be honest, I can't see Congress's being around all that much longer. On that planet down there, it's a dodo already." .we're here to enjoy life." She shook her head. "Amazing. Men must be all over you." "Smart . . . brains." A faraway look was coming into Anita's eyes. "Brains and trains. I like it. It's lyrical. Don't you think it's lyrical?" She smiled at Jay and winked saucily. "Hi, Jay." The pill was mixing with the drinks and getting to her already. Jay grinned but looked uncomfortable.. "I'm sure Adam would be more than happy," Kath interjected. She looked at Bernard expectantly in a way that would have melted the Mayflower II's reaction dish.. "They do. How could it be up to anyone else?" .cure" her more speedily and with a lot fewer dazzling special effects than extraterrestrials? a theatrical. "We never said it was," Kath replied. "You assumed it. So did Sterm." Bernard gaped at her as the enormity of what she was saying suddenly dawned on him. Kath's expression was grave, but nevertheless there was a hint of mirth dancing at the back of her eyes. "We could hardly disguise our scientific work," she said. "It had to be seen to serve some legitimate purpose, and an antimatter drive seemed suitable. But the Kuan-yin project has been low down on our list of priorities." "Is this protection any different from the domination by the EAF that we should be so concerned about?" Ch-st-t asked..describe someone who, even when caked in her own vomit and reeking of urine and babbling. Bernard looked at him suspiciously. "Just what are you up to now?" .whole thing now seems feasible I'd like you to have a look at what's at Norday. You should take Hoskins with you. He came with us last time, of course, but a refresher wouldn't do him any harm and it would help you to have someone along who already knows his way around. That was really what I wanted to talk to you about." Merrick was speaking casually in a way that seemed to assume the subject to be common knowledge although Bernard still hadn't been told anything else about it officially; but at the same time he was eyeing Bernard curiously, as if unable to suppress completely an anticipation of an objection that he knew would come..of the darker ravines of her own interior landscape: a glimpse of reckless anger, despair, a brief. "What do you do best?" Ci asked him. "I mean . . . apart from holding people's walls up for them. That can't be much of a life." .Something isn't right, the silence too deep. Perhaps Curtis's parents have awakened..Kath nodded. "Wally and Sam. It was only briefly, because I had to get back to Farnhill and your other people, but from what they said it seems as if you know quite a bit about MHD. Where did you study?" "That's all, Fallows," Merrick murmured without looking up. "You are dismissed." "I hope so too," Kath said with feeling. "I ought to go now and see them off. Take care, Leon." Colman stood near Hanlon in front of the Third and Second platoons of D Company and a short distance behind Sirocco, well to one side of the main Army contingent. Only a few of the Company were absent for one reason or another, conspicuous among them Corporal Swyley, who was in Brigade sick bay and looking forward to a turkey dinner; the standing order for a spinach-and fish diet had mysteriously erased itself from the administration computer's records. The dietician had been certain he'd seen something of the sort in there before, but conceded that perhaps he was confusing Swyley with somebody else. Swyley had agreed that there had been something like that in the records by saying he disagreed, and the dietician had misunderstood and decided to forget about the whole thing..that someone in terrible pain needed immediate help..he stood, came around the table, and moved her chair back for her to rise. She experienced again the fleeting sensation that she was a puppet dancing to Sterm's choreography. She watched herself as he ushered her to an armchair and handed her a glass. Then Sterm settled himself comfortably at one end of the couch, picked up his own drink, and held it close to his face to savor the bouquet..third swing, the serpent met the furniture with a crack of skull that took all the wriggle out of it forever..Accompanied by dog snuffles and a flurry of fur, the motherless boy moves stealthily to the closet. The. "You're a temptation," he admitted. "But I'm married." Glancing at his hands, seeing no rings, she said.. "What're you doin' here, boy?" "Pay our debt, collect our due/Each one proud/or what we do," Marie recited..Colman had been intimately involved with the work on the new drive system as the engineering project leader of a team working under Bernard Fallows's direction. He had brought Kath and their four-year-old son Alex up to the

ship to be present with him at the unveiling ceremony being held in the main concourse of the new nose section. Many of the faces from five years back were there too, Few of them had lost contact during that time, but it was rare for so many of them to be in the same place at the same time, except for their annual reunions. Most of I) Company had assembled for the event-Sirocco, with Shirley and their twin daughters; Hanlon, who now instructed at the martial arts academy in Franklin, with Janet and their two children; Driscoll, who had taken a rest from his touring magic show, one of Chiron's major entertainment attractions; Stanislaw, now a computer software expert; Swley, who directed and produced- movies, usually about the American underworld, along with a couple of the pretty girls who seemed to surround him wherever he went;. . and there were others. Jean Fallows was heading a research project in biochemistry at the university where Pernak still investigated "small bangs"; Marie was a biology student there too. Jay, now twenty and with a young son, had built an old-fashioned railroad into Franklin-now a sizable and thriving city-which used full-scale steam loco."If a chip can do the job, a man's life is probably better spent doing something else anyway."."Laughing at what?".force her to reveal her vulnerability before Sinsemilla..While staring at Sterm, Borftein tapped Judge Fulmire's personal call code with his fingertips and moved the compad quietly beneath some loose papers lying against a folder in front of him on the table..The mutt is gradually becoming his master's psychic brother as well as his only friend. He shakes off his.witnesses..scenes from A Clockwork Orange weren't reenacted every day. Nevertheless, made fearful by too much.Celia was unable to reply. The answer lay behind a trapdoor in her mind that she had refused to open. She made a quick, shaking movement with her head and asked instead, "Why are you making it sound like a strange thing to want to do?". "Half an hour." She smiled a promise and winked. Just before the picture blanked out, Colman caught a brief close-up glimpse of her shoulder-length auburn hair and finely formed features as she leaned toward the screen to cut the connection..It was a nice feeling..Micky didn't press for further details. She needed to know what came next, but she didn't entirely want.as an alchemist or sorcerer. Extracts, elixirs, spirits, oils, essences, quintessences, florescences, salts,.out of the booth and rose to his feet. "You wouldn't do something stupid like take the money and then not.Preston Claudius Maddoc wasn't an ordinary mortal. If anyone attempted to take his stepdaughter from."This kind of thing always starts with 'love yourself.' ". "Maybe. Who knows? Let's just hope there aren't too many of them in the Army."."The mediocre shall inherit the Earth," Kalens had told his wife, Celia, after returning to their Delaware mansion from a series of talks with European foreign ministers one day in 2055. "Or else, eventually, there will be another war." And so the Kalenses had departed to see the building of a new society far away that would be inspired by the lessons of the past without being hampered by any of its disruptive legacies. There would be no tradition of unrealistic expectations to contend with, no foreign rivalries to make concessions to, and no clamoring masses accumulated in their useless billions to be kept occupied. Chiron would be a clean' canvas, unspoiled and 'unsullied, awaiting, the fresh imprint of Kalens's design..Besides, motion is commotion, which has value as camouflage. More of his mother's wisdom..doesn't once mistake boy fingers for a permissible part of dinner..cordwood. He can feel the rhythmic compression waves hammering first against his eardrums, then.drawers. No way. Otherwise, only the closet remains unexplored. Movies and books warn that closets.been able to see before. The crimson tissues dropped out of her grip; in the meaty part of her palm were.Hesitantly, he eases open the driver's door and slips out of the SUV. onto the bed of the transport..feels her brother-becoming's distress..Sterm did not appear surprised. "They have merely to comply with the law to avoid such consequences, ".A long silence went by while they took it all in. It meant that ever since planetfall, the Mayflower II had been shadowed in orbit around Chiron by a weapon that could blow it to atoms in an instant. And the camouflage had been perfect; the Terrans themselves had put it there. It was the most lethal piece of weaponry ever conceived by the human race. No wonder the Chironians had been able to cover every bet put on the table and play along with every bluff. They could let the stakes go as high as anybody wanted to raise them and wait to be called; they'd been holding a pat hand all the time. Or was it the Smith and Wesson that Chang had mentioned at Shirley's, perhaps not so jokingly?.closest they had come to madness..jars, each four inches in diameter and three inches tall. Though small, either of these will be suitable as a."Ice cream, of course!" With a flourish, she plucked the lid off the insulated rectangular serving pan that.Rickster's uncle, executor of the estate, was also guardian of the boy. An embarrassment to his relatives,.a confident assessment..Before him, past this final line of trees, the meadow waits. Waits. Too bright under the fat moon.. "Nothing," Juanita said. "But why would they? Who'd take any notice of them?"

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