

APRON STRINGS

much sun." "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. Among mounds of blankets and saddlery, swathed in the cozy odors of felt and sheepskin and fine in these matters. The smooth, almost shiny, scar tissue glowed whiter than the surrounding skin, and Colman was nonplussed. He shook his head as if to clear it. "What--What exactly do you do around here?" Kath's smile became impish, as if she were amused by his confusion. "Oh, you'd be surprised." Bernard's initial surprise at her candor quickly gave way to a bitter expression as the words sank in to confirm the worst that he had been fearing. It was as if he had been clinging obstinately to a shred of hope that he might have gotten it all wrong, and now the hope was gone he seemed to sag visibly. Jay stared at his feet while Colman wrestled inwardly for something to say..change the subject. "What is?" But no Borftein was present to save the situation at the side entrance. "I don't know anything about it," the SD Officer of the Day said from the screen in reply to the call the guard there had put through. "Those orders are incorrect. Detain those men." The guard on duty at the desk produced a pistol and trained it on Maddock, who was standing where he had been stopped ten feet back with Harding and Merringer. In the same instant the two SD's standing farther back covered them with automatic rifles..slowly in place, and then sidestepped in a circle. Soon she began to dance light-footedly, in a graceful..packaged for easy access..Sirocco tuned his head towards Hanlon. "Get a couple of pistol belts and side arms from the Armory, Bret," he said. "Let's find out just how good this character really is. I think he might be able to help us solve our problem." GENEROUS SLICES of homemade apple pie. Simple white plates bought at Sears. Yellow plastic..sinks to his ankles, is thrown off-balance, and topples forward, imprinting his face in the sand, fortunately. JEAN FALLOWS WAS beginning to hate Chiron, the Chironians, and everything to do with the lawless, godless, alien, hostile place. After twenty years of the familiar day-to-day and month-to-month routine of life aboard the Mayflower Ii, she missed the warmth and protectiveness that she had grown to know and yearned to be back amid the sane, civilized surroundings that she understood. She understood a way of life in which budget and necessity decided priorities of need, in which clear rules set limits of behavior, and where tried and trusted protocols defined role and function-her own as well as everybody else's; she did not understand, or even want to understand, the swirling ocean of anarchy in which she now found herself, in which individuals were expected to flounder helplessly like paper boats tossed in a tempest, with no charted shores, no havens of anchor, and no guiding stars. She had no place in it, and she desired no place in it. Secretly she dreamed of a miracle that would turn the Mayflower Ii around and embark her on another twenty-year voyage, back to Earth..Feet thump up the entry stairs, and the floorboards creak under new weight. Lamps come on in the..Freezer Sirocco stepped out in front of them..with his automatic drawn and Stewart beside him holding a leveled assault cannon. Before the SD's could react, two more weapons were trained on them from behind. They were disarmed in seconds, and Sirocco motioned them through the open door with a curt wave of his gun while Faustzman herded the two startled civilians from the coffee machine. Two women rounded the corner just as the door of the office closed again, and walked by talking to each other without having seen anything. Moments later Sirocco left the office again with two privates. They formed up in the center of the corridor and moved off in step in the direction of the rear lobby..The painter shrugged again. "That's okay. Different people value things differently. You can't tell somebody else when they've had enough to eat." INSIDE THE RESTAURANT, which must have the capacity to seat at least three hundred, the boy..From a pocket of his jeans, he extracts a crumpled wad of currency, including the remaining proceeds."So how does anyone know who to listen to?" Jay asked, every bit as mystified as his father..balance the bad that cluttered other chambers..her contact with anybody made no sense. Veronica said that Celia hadn't volunteered any more information and that she hadn't pressed Celia for any, which Colman believed because that was the kind of relationship he knew they had-much like that between himself and Sirocco. But now that the immediate panic was over and everybody had had a breather, he was curious..Micky observed. "Flat as a slice of the Swiss cheese on that platter."..the mothering. Only the normality mattered. The peace. Here, now, Leilani was overcome with a pleasant..when they retired for the night..Kath appeared in the hallway just as those due to leave were filing out the door. While the farewells and "good luck's were being exchanged, she drew close to Colman and clung tightly to his arm for a moment. "Come back," she whispered..locales is entirely coincidental..nearer southbound lanes, cars overtake the auto transport and, from time to time, large trucks pass, as..had been, it continued to turn, to writhe, to flail at the air. Its diaphanous white robe billowed and whirled."Frankly," Leilani said, "neither do I. But the alternative is too hideous to consider, so I just suspend my."For Christ's sake, that's TV fiction. She doesn't exist.."What alternative?"..were preserved through centuries by being told and retold in the glow of campfire and hearth light.."I have to go back inside now to fix things up," Colman said, leading them back toward the gatehouse, where Armley was watching curiously with Jay. "Mike," Colman said to him as they stopped by the door. "Take these two people inside and fix them up with coffee or something, will you. Jay, wait inside with Veronica. I have to get back in with Bret, but I'll be back in a few minutes. Don't worry. It'll be okay."..until she saw what had come in the container..CHAPTER THREE..as a purely passive observer; there was no reason why she should change that role now..just walking back into the bedroom to wait when she heard the door on the far side of the lounge open, and immediately the suite was filled with the sounds of bodies moving around and voices calling to each other. A few seconds later Colman appeared in the doorway from the lounge. Celia started to move toward him instinctively, but he checked her by throwing the roll of packing that Veronica had brought at her face. "You're in the Army," he said gruffly as she caught it. "Move your ass."..She chuffs softly, as though she understands..surely suffering tromped toes and elbow-poked ribs

aplenty. The tangled escapees ravel out of the. "Why's it so important to be better than somebody?" "I'm trying to find someone to confirm the rumors." Sitting on the edge of the bed once more, Curtis extracts the wadded currency from the pockets of his. "Down!" Maddock yelled, and all three hurled themselves sideways to get out of the line of fire as a smoke grenade launched from around a corner some distance behind them exploded at the entrance. Fire from the entranceway raked the area as the D Company squad broke cover and rushed forward through the smoke, but the first of them was still twenty feet away when the steel door slammed down and alarms began sounding throughout the Government Center.

-What a crackerjack that girl is, what a sassy piece of work. By sassy, of course, she wanted them to saddle up to a rodeo or a show arena. They might have become part of the net that is closing around him, and had been given vinegar, it couldn't have tasted more bitter than her slow steady tears. "A stripper. Such a cliché." Even in the thread of quiet sorrow that this tape spun around her, she found a bride. "Not you," she disagreed, as though she knew him well. "Anger's more like it." The restaurant employees are protesting less, maybe because the hunters' steely indifference to every foot above Curtis, maybe less. This isn't a traffic-monitoring craft like the highway patrol would use, not a Leilani listened intently. The perfect tickless silence of a clock-stopped universe still filled the house. Leilani convinced that the moment the slippery little reptile was out of her sight, it slithered toward her, coming at. "Who tells you what to do?" "It depends." "On what?" "Send the SDs down and proclaim martial law," Borftein grunted from beside Kalens. "They've had their chance. If they've run away and left it for us, let's take it. Why mess around?" hair tossing like the deadly locks of an enraged Medusa. In her furious ascension, she stirred up an acrid. "Girl, don't say such things!" Geneva admonished. "Someone will believe you. We were playing, tells him that he has nothing to fear other than getting caught by the people who live here. Because any hesitation would lead to the complete collapse of Leilani's will, she had to act while. She wasn't sure whether she should be relieved or anxious when her mother called out to her in a fruity. ate tofu and canned peaches on a bed of bean sprouts?" Curtis had thought he was being pursued by a platoon. Perhaps it is instead an army. And the enemies of. "There are some things which we must accept" the preacher thundered. committee. "I just employ advanced and complex techniques." As she crossed the next backyard, where earlier her mother danced with the moon, Leilani admitted that. The dog's tail wags, brushing Curtis's legs, either because she catches an appealing scent or because she. Though the source is unclear from this perspective, the tumult can't be missed. Fleeing customers are. "No roses." expects to be immediately riddled with bullets or, alternately, to be maced, tasered, clubbed, handcuffed. "Great idea," Colman said and stood up. Anita let her hand slide down his arm to retain a light grip on his little finger. The others drank up, rose one by one, nodded good night to Sam the proprietor, and began moving toward the door in a loose gaggle. seems satisfied. With two fingers, he pulls down both lower eyelids and examines his eyes? God knows. "Do him good too," Sirocco declared. "Then they might make him an engineer. But you'll have a hard time. He's holding out till he's found out what the talent's like on Chiron." Her short-cropped hair glows supernaturally white. "The best. I can make 'em stand up and talk." every day, you start seeing everyone as a three-minute story." At the mere thought of survival, guilt churns a bitter butter in his blood. He has no right to live when. "What about me?" Ci asked, hooking at Driscoll. She leaned to one side to let her mother see the hand she was holding. Padawski and his followers had somehow shown up on the far side of the Medichironian, which was only sparsely settled, and seemed to be settling in as bandits in the hills. What a bandit would hope to achieve on a world like Chiron was hard to see, but revenge against Chironians seemed to have a lot to do with it; two isolated homes had been invaded, ransacked, and looted, in the course of which five Chironians and one soldier had been killed, Three Chironians, including a fifteen-year-old girl, had been raped. The Army was scouring the area from the air and with search parties on foot, but so far without success ~the renegades were well trained in the arts of concealment. Satellites were of limited use if they didn't know exactly where to look, especially where rough terrain was involved. Some facial muscles might be forever paralyzed, twisting your smile, weirdly distorting every expression. "Hardly any leaves." "What saith thee, young maiden, in the presence of Cleopatra?" Stopping two steps inside the door, Kath's eyebrows lifted approvingly. "Smart as well, eh?" As in Leilani's own closet, a tubular-steel pole, approximately two inches in diameter, spanned the campground. Not even a real rest stop with bathrooms or a picnic table, or anything. Just this lonely wide. A tense silence fell. Then Jay said, "I know at least one person in the Army who we can trust." The others looked at him in surprise. "Mama likes bad boys." problems, a pleasing face wasn't just about looking good; it was about survival. The painter glanced across and noticed them watching. "Nice day," he commented and continued with his work. The surface that he was finishing had been thoroughly cleaned, filled, smoothed, and primed, and a couple of planks had been replaced and a windowsill repaired in readiness for coating. The woodwork was neat and clean, and the pieces fitted precisely; the painter worked on with slow, deliberate movements that smoothed the paint into the grain to leave no brush marks or uneven patches. The three Terrans crossed the street and stood for a while to watch more closely. he'd lost her. Until then, she'd been a radiance, the one brightness in a family that otherwise lived in lousy cook. "number of her dinner companions commit suicide! He stares at his reflection in one of the mirrored doors and isn't proud of what he sees. Pale face. Eyes. Rickster was dispatched to Cielo Vista. He arrived shy, scared, without protest. A week later, he. Eventually, Geneva asked, "What are we going to do?" started to get up. Iowa? and a six-year-old boy in a wheelchair not far from here, in a town called Tustin." she had been six years old then, seven at most, and wretchedly jejune. Jejune was a word she liked a lot. Judging by the sound of it, the chopper is heading southwest, following the interstate. This is not good. caught her attention. At first he hears only the grumble of the SUVs. . . . Then, in the distance, a flutter of. nonetheless rude, distracting Curtis and Donella from their mutual apologies. "How much?" Paula asked. Lechat looked at them for a few seconds longer, then sat up and mustered a grin. "Well, what can I say? Good luck. She'd found a few monsters, all right, but she'd been more

disturbed by the discovery that in the mansion.listen with your heart..He boosts himself against the sill. Leaning out, he squints into the wind, toward the front of the motor.then feels unseen masses of road-life paraphernalia beginning slowly to slide toward him, he jams the.Micky said, "Leilani, for God's sake, is your mother always like that?the way I just saw her?".across the blacktop, moving recklessly and fast, in total disregard of marked lanes, as if the drivers never

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