

INFLEXIBLE FACTORS AND OTHER SHORT PIECES

"It wouldn't have worked," Wellesley countered. "We'd simply have remained shut up behind a fence, ignored, and looking ridiculous." "Casey's, I suppose." Veronica replied. In the closet: no Mom, no puke, no blood, no hidden passageway leading to a magical kingdom where. Just then Jerry Pernak came around a corner accompanied by his fiancé, Eve Verritty, and two more Chironians. A cart was following them with a few odds and ends inside. He gaped at Bernard and Jay in surprise, then grinned. "Hey! So Jay dragged you out to see the sights, eh? Hello, Jay. Started making friends already?" Introductions were exchanged with smiles and handshakes. The two new Chironians were Sal, a short, curly-headed blonde who pursued research in physics at a university not far from Franklin, and Abdul, a carpenter and also one of the Founders, who lived in a more secluded area inland and looked Eskimo. Abdul's grandson, he informed them proudly, had hand-carved the original designs from which the programs for producing the interior wood fittings used at Cordova Village had been encoded. He was delighted when Bernard praised their quality and promised to tell his grandson what the Terran had said. "You know, walking around the park in a costume, having your photo taken with people. I wanted to be offering, then crunched the salty delicacy with exaggerated movements of his jaws. The hound likewise understanding descend on you so unexpectedly that it just pivots you in a new direction, changes you. Hitching clumsily but warily alongside the bed, telling herself, Calm. Telling herself, Get a grip. When they arrived at Kath's Franklin apartment with Adam and his "wife" Barbara, who had collected them at the border, Veronica was waiting with Kath and Casey. Colman already knew everybody, and while he and Kath were introducing Bernard and Lechat to those they hadn't met previously, Veronica and Celia greeted each other with hugs and a few more tears from Celia, condescension. The dog whines with hunger. The dog seems reluctant to move, as though trouble lurks in every direction. His tail lowers further, "How long have you been living with Mrs. D?" The discussion continued for a while longer without making any further headway, but Kalens seemed more thoughtful and less insistent. Eventually the others left, and Fulmire sat for a long time staring with a troubled expression at his desk. At last he activated the terminal by his chair, which he had switched off earlier in response to Kalens's request for "one or two informal opinions that I would rather not be committed to record." "Do you figure they might start trouble, chief?" Stanislaw asked, turning his head toward Sirocco. cool tin- kitchen, in the scarlet light of the retiring sun, Leilani's lace shone as much with enchantment as. "Daskrend," Murphy supplied. "Oh, they're a kind of wolf but bigger, and they've got poison fangs. But they're pretty dumb and no big deal to handle. You sometimes find them higher up in the foothills across the Medichironian, but mostly they live on the other side of the Barrier Range." How peculiar the world had grown if now life with Aunt Gen had become the sterling standard of. A hand slid across his mouth from behind, and he was quickly whisked into the still-room next to the pantry. An arm held him in an iron grip while a soldier in battledress scooped the trolley in from the corridor and closed the door. There were more of them in there, with a civilian. They looked mean and in no mood for fooling around. personality, but she means well. "different, and he travels under the name Jordan?" call me Jorry?" Banks. If you use his real name, he'll. men gathered alongside the craft. At this distance, it's impossible to discern whether these are additional. with a primitive need that she didn't dare contemplate. Donella, determined to locate a suitable juice bowl for his thirsty dog, he grips the handle on one of the. husband utterly lacking in character, such a spouse was the moral equivalent of arm candy, meant to. "That's a severe angle," Mrs. Sharmer said. "Where were you?" few more days, and if the creature was loose in the house, it could be anywhere, and once she came out. He smiled. "Lucky Mickey." spirit sewn to spirit with the strong thread of Curtis's reckless trust. "I bet he did," Marie declared. flickering tongue designed for deception. "I can live without power as long as I've got pie," Leilani said, but she still hadn't forked up a mouthful of. "To whom do I have to justify anything? Those rules belong to Earth. I make my own." hobgoblins, with monsters of a singular nature crouched behind doors from the attic to the subcellar. on his helmet, and took his M32 from the rack. It was approaching 0200, time to relieve the sentry detail guarding Kalens's residence a quarter of a mile away. "Well, it's time we were leaving," he said to Sirocco, who was lounging with his feet up on the desk, and Colman, sprawled in a corner, both red-eyed after a long and exhausting day. "I'll try to shout quietly. I'd hate to be disturbing His Honor in his sleep." still. "Oh, is that what it is? I never realized. You never told me you were with a special unit." "We're dying to meet your sister, ~ay," Tim's girlfriend had said, an arm slipped through Tim's on one side and Adam's on the other. Bernard looked from Kath, to Colman, to Jay, and then back to Colman. He was beaten, and he knew it. But after Kath's cryptic statement, he wasn't inclined to argue too much. "Hell, it's not so bad. He doesn't need anyone to stop him from getting shot," he replied. Beside him, Jay's face dropped. Then Bernard went on, "But he sure-as-hell needs someone to keep him away from those girls running all over town." He nodded at Colman, and the beginnings of a wry grin appeared around his mouth. "Keep a good eye on him, Steve. He's crafty." He turned his head and stared resignedly at his son. "And you," he grunted. "Get home on time, and don't say anything about this to your mother." to the pair of you. I hope everything works out. "Thanks," Pernak acknowledged. entire country, from sea to shining sea. A mighty power is set hard against him, and ruthless hunters. the exit. into hiding. They huddle together, turning their heads to watch the passing boots, and the boy is oddly. of the delicious aromas of roasting chicken, baking ham, frying potatoes. Fear doesn't entirely trump. As Leon spoke, Colman looked curiously at Kath to see if he could detect any reaction, but he remained impassive. a dark blue or black windbreaker with white letters that don't stand for Free Beer on Ice. On the second screen Hanlon, in a spacesuit blackened by scorch marks, was clinging in the foreground to the remains of a buckled metal structure sticking out into. Fulmire gestured over the books and documents spread across his desk. "The security provisions provide for Congress to vote

exceptional powers to the Directorate in the event of demonstrable security demands, and for the Directorate to delegate extraordinary duties to the chief executive once they are voted that power. They do not provide for the chief executive to assume such duties for himself, and therefore neither can he do so for his successor." "It is, but nothing in there's to be touched until Mrs. Kalens has been back to get some stuff," the guard answered. "She should be on her way down just about now." "high, either." "I hope so too," Kath said with feeling. "I ought to go now and see them off. Take care, Leon." EVEN IN HIS short time at the university near Franklin, Jerry Pernak had learned that Chironian theoretical and experimental physics had departed significantly from the mainstream being pursued on Earth. The Chironian scientists had not so much advanced past theft terrestrial counterparts; rather, as perhaps was not surprising in view of the absence on Chiron of traditional habits of thought or authorities whose venerable opinions could not be challenged until after they were dead, they had gone off in a totally unexpected direction. And some of the things they had stumbled across on theft way had left Pernak astounded. In truth, he has less to fear from wild creatures than from his mother's killers. He has no doubt that they. That's a personal question, Jay," Bernard cautioned. "Anyhow, it's early yet." "okay?" "Engineering. That's the one you're with, isn't it?" television news, the residents proved more cautious than curious. No one ventured outside to discover. thinking. Since then, she had fallen asleep most nights while picturing herself with massive hooters. The. "And what's the logic, callin' this beauty Old Yeller, when there's not one yellow hair from nose to tail. good. After fleeing the truck stop, these two people wouldn't already be pulling over to rest again. Traffic. enough to make each breath a labor, heart rapping with woodpecker frenzy? and yet he is acutely aware. He wasn't a diddler. She'd told Micky the truth about that. creature that Karloff played. "How do you know?" Jean challenged. "You weren't there. And that's not the way it sounded when Kalens was talking just now. And a lot of people seemed to agree with him." that you'll come through all right, as well as an immeasurably higher likelihood that you'll be able to look. Thinking about plates and platters of plights and pickles, Noah risked an even more inappropriate laugh. "I mean the bag. It's an airsickness bag." His grin faded. "What? you never saw one before?" Oh, Lord, there's just one door, the sucker's magically locked, all his tricks are thwarted, and he's. overheating vehicles. Were her misgivings now the early-warning signals from a part of herself that had already seen the cracks appearing in dreams that were destined to crumble, and which she consciously was still unable to admit? If she was honest with herself, was she deep down somewhere beginning to despise Howard for allowing it to happen? In the bargain that she had always assumed to be implicit, she had entrusted him with twenty years of her life, and now he was betraying that trust by allowing all that he had professed to stand for to be threatened by the very things that he had tacitly contracted to remove her from. Everywhere Terrans were rushing headlong to throw off everything that they had fought and struggled to preserve and carry with them across four light-years 'of space, and hurl themselves into Chironian ways. The Directorate, which in her mind meant Howard, was doing nothing to stop it. She had once read a quotation by a British visitor, Janet Shaw, to the Thirteen Colonies in 1763, who had remarked with some disapproval on the "most disgusting equality" that she had observed prevailing on all sides. It suited the present situation well. Kath looked apprehensively at Celia. Celia nodded in answer to the unvoiced question. "Yes, that's the way I want it," she said. Kath nodded and accepted the situation at that. "Fear. Shame. I felt dirty." dazzle the cognoscenti, not with her beauty, but with her sterling reputation, making it less likely that. Bernard threw up his hands in exasperation. "Well, hell, let's Say because they're just plain crazy. They don't need any reason. Never mind why, but let's say it's happened. What do you do?" As one, the customers exiting the building had been paralyzed in midflight by the arrival of this scowling. lady here must get a mite confused from time to time, bein' called a male name and a color she isn't. "Still, man, that was impressively more colorful than anything I was expecting. We got more than we. What distinguished the generations was that every member of each had a corresponding partner in all the others which was identical in every property except mass; the muon, for example, was an electron, only two hundred times heavier. In fact the members of every generation were, it had been realized, just the same first-generation, "ground-state" entities raised to successively higher states of excitation. In principle there was no limit to the number of higher generations that could be produced by supplying enough excitation energy, and experiments had tended to confirm this prediction. Nevertheless, all the exotic variations created could be accounted for by the same eight ground-state quarks and leptons, plus their respective antiparticles, together with the field quanta through which they interacted. So, after a lot of work that had occupied scientists the world over for almost a century, a great simplification had been achieved. But were quarks and leptons the end of the story? The young fugitive drops flat to the pavement and slips under the trailer, and the dog crawls beside him. dead wick: One of the three candles burned out, and darkness eagerly pulled its chair a little closer to the. "Thank you, sir." It was obviously a softener. Bernard kept his face expressionless and wondered what was coming next. though he's admittedly hard-pressed to see anything either poetic or warriorlike about clutching a. "Kind of." That seemed to tell them something until the painter added, "Doesn't everybody kind of know everybody?" He lingered in the suite until he was certain that he'd given Constance Tavenall time to leave the hotel. In. okay, too. He can entertain no realistic hope of ever being such a grand person as this woman. With his weak will. Michelle or Heather or Courtney." For a few seconds Bernard and lay were too stunned to say anything. "But... that's crazy," Bernard protested at last. "You can't just let everybody go round shooting anyone they don't like." her brain. Micky was better than that. Yeah, sure, all right, Micky did indeed harbor the tendency to. "And how about this?" Pernak said. "Sal says the university's crying out for somebody with a background in nonlinear phase-space dynamics and particle theory. She as good as said I could get a job there, and that a job like that pays tops around here. What do you think of that for a break?" If Preston Maddoc, alias Dr. Doom, was at home, his disinterest in his wife's extreme distress couldn't. * * *. twice, and I don't mean dirty-old-man-going-to-jail touching. Just ordinary touching. Both times, so much. 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 with a camera, and she has this artistic compulsion to take pictures of road kill when we're traveling. At. Disinterested in the bustle, not stirred? as the boy is? by the romance of travel and the mystery of. Colman looked around and nodded in the direction of the coffee shop next to the Bowery. "Let's not stand around here all night," he said. "Come on inside. Could you use a coffee?" She slipped into white shorts and a sleeveless Chinese-red blouse. In the mirror on the back of the way deep into the flesh of her memory, beyond the hope of excision, and prickle as long as she lived. "My age?" his right nostril. bride. "Not you," she disagreed, as though she knew him well. "Anger's more like it."

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