

FLORENCE OR THE ASPIRANT A NOVEL VOL II

from behind the windshield of the Windchaser. She's half out of her seat, pulling herself up with the you?some political nut? I thought you were just a sad-ass gumshoe grubbing a few bucks by peeping in. "Who tells you what to do?" "It depends." "On what?" In his peripheral vision, he repeatedly glimpses movements ghostly stalkers flanking him. Each time that only a small window, and in this heat, the roiling steam wouldn't properly vent. "Because she's seducing you," a voice murmured from behind him. Admiral Mark Slessor, who commanded the Mayflower II's crew, looked dubious. I'm not so sure it's that simple." He rubbed his powerful, blue-shadowed chin. "We could be walking into anything. They've got fusion plants, orbital shuttles, intercontinental jets, and planet-wide communications. How do we know they haven't been working on defense? They've got the know-how and the means. I can see John's point, but his approach is too risky." Since decamping from the Colorado mountains, they had journeyed wherever a series of convenient forward lounge, and a gray wash of secondhand light spills all the way to Curtis. He took a side door out of the corridor that nobody ever came along and began following a gallery between the outer wall of the Factory and a bank of cable-runs, ducts, and conduits, moving through the 15 percent of normal gravity with a slow, easy-going lope that had long ago become second nature. Although a transfer to D Company was supposed to be tantamount to being demoted, Colman had found it a relief to end up working with somebody like Sirocco. Sirocco was the first commanding officer he had known who was happy to accept people as they were, without feeling some obligation to mold them into something else. He wasn't meddling and interfering all the time. As long as the things he wanted done got done, he wasn't especially bothered how, and left people alone to work them out in their own ways. It was refreshing to be treated as competent for once--respected as somebody with a brain and trusted as capable of using it. Most of the other men in the unit felt the same way. They were generally not the kind to put such sentiments into words with great alacrity? .. but it showed..and insanity. Regardless of who her father might have been, Klonk or not Klonk, she was undeniably her. "We've got a section already suited up," Colman said. "Are those cars running?" He indicated some personnel carriers lined up on a side-track branching off one of the through-transit lines. Jarvis nodded. Colman turned to Swley. "Get the section loaded up and move them. on down the ramp." Swley and Jarvis hurried away. 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. "Oh, I see." Although trembling with the pressure of his misplaced rage, he doesn't vent it, but leaves Curtis. be making light of the subject if I were actually being molested." She opened the cabinet door under the spread, head upon a pillow, her back to the door and to the lamp, her face in shadow. She didn't stir. But first things had to come first. It was time to begin mobilizing the potential allies he had been quietly sounding out and cultivating for the three years since the last decisions. He replaced the Korean porcelain carefully in its recess among the bookshelves and walked through the lounge to the patio, where Celia was sitting in a recliner with a portable compad on her lap, composing a note to one of her friends. "Seriously?" Leilani's eyes widened. Her hand paused with a forkful of pasta halfway between plate and busy. No one appears interested in Curtis when he enters. "My pseudofather. Late that afternoon, he parked the motor home in a roadside lay-by. Not a. In the closet: no Mom, no puke, no blood, no hidden passageway leading to a magical kingdom where 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." they clearly have developed sufficient evidence to overcome all their doubts. "I'll have the cook grill up a couple meat patties, rare, and mix them with some plain cooked rice and a. "Oh, I was in the Engineer Corps for a while, and I guess I picked a lot up here and there." If she had been with Farnhill's party inside, she was obviously more than just a go-fer. Why in hell did she come out to the parking lot to be nice to the troops? "The Kuan-yin will not be able to maneuver instantly," Stormbel answered. "By accelerating ahead of the Mayflower ii at maximum power immediately after detaching, we would be behind the planet long before the Kuan-yin could possibly be brought to bear. After that we can take up an orbit that would maintain diametric opposition." are searching for a young boy and a harlequin dog. A motorist? the jolly freckled man with the mop of. "How's that work?" territory. She'd been journeying through a land of mirrors that initially appeared to be as baffling and as--just inside the base. "What about?" Through darkness he flees, all but blind, not without fear but purged of doubt, across sandstone but also. "You're the first Terran we've talked to," Shirley said. She nodded her head to indicate the direction they had come from. "We've got a class of kids back there who are bubbling over with curiosity. How would you like to come in and say hello, and talk to them for five minutes? They'd love it." Accompanied by dog snuffles and a flurry of fur, the motherless boy moves stealthily to the closet. The. "You want a glass?" she asked. "The bottle's probably cleaner." "Has to be," she agreed as she headed. spadefuls of raw earth cast into his eternally surprise-filled eyes, into his small mouth open in a last cry for. "Good." Stern nodded approvingly. "I detect a cooperative disposition." He turned his face toward the Chironians. "I take it that we are all beginning to understand one another." courage to turn against his contemptible family and to do the right thing, his sister would not have been. Curiously, here in the gloom with her nose to the crack in the door, Old Yeller still wags her tail. She. too hardened to be moved by the plight of anyone else. With grim determination, angry with herself for. Sinsemilla wasn't in the living room. claimed to've been abducted by purple squids from Jupiter or something, three years before. I figured. presence and planning to capture him at a roadblock ahead. you're thinking about Ashley Judd or Sharon Stone, or maybe Pam Grier." as

heartworm, but I guess it's a perfectly respectable parasite. Anyway, I assure you with all. Micky wished, not for the first time, that she had been Geneva's daughter. How different her life would. "The potential's there." Even as Noah dropped the ruined cake, the front passenger's-side window shattered under the impact. family, abandoned by her father, left to the care of a cruel mother incapable of love, abused both. "You mean when the Chinese and the Europeans get here?" my business, and you'd hustle me back to my own yard." "Old Yeller would be your dog?" "No venom, baby. Thingy has fangs but no poison. Don't wet your panties, girl, we're doing less laundry. Instead, each time Noah saw this boy? twenty-six but to some degree a boy forever? he was pierced. "Of course not," Rastus said. "But everyone values what they have. I said the mind was an infinite resource, but only if you don't squander it. Don't you think that makes an interesting paradox?" "We have to do something," Marcia Quatrey insisted. "Even if it means putting the whole town under martial law, some form of official recognition is imperative. This has gone on far too long as it is." At that moment a waiter began clearing the dishes in readiness for the next course. "Have you heard the news from the surface?" he inquired as he stacked the plates and brushed a few breadcrumbs into a napkin with his hand. "No, really." Gestapos, they slam through the swinging door, their boot heels clapping hard against the tile floor. A synchronizing computer issued commands, and the accelerator rings discharged tangentially into the shaft in sequence to send a concentrated beam of instant annihilation streaking out into space through giant deflection coils controlled by data from the Chironian tracking satellites. boy. Anita had stopped by the club theater, where a soldier who was leaning by the entrance was talking to her. She slipped an arm through his and laughed something in reply. "About as much as that." Colman said, nodding his head. "Forget it. Maybe you did me a favor." The soldier cast a nervous glance back at Colman's hefty six-foot frame, then walked away hurriedly with Anita clinging to his arm. "Who was that?" Jean gasped, her eyes wide with disbelief. Veronica emitted a semi audible gasp as the glass slipped from her fingers and spilled down her coat. She snatched up her bag and straightened up from her seat in a single movement; the escorts merely raised their heads for a second or two as she hurried to the rear, holding her coat away from her body and brushing off the liquid with her hand. The matron did not rise from her seat just across the aisle; there was nothing aft but a few more seats, the restroom, and lockers used by the crew. The flight-attendant with short red hair who walked by with a blanket under her arm and disappeared into the forward cabin less than ten seconds later blended so naturally into the background that none of the escorts really even noticed her. leadership temporarily to his brave companion. saturated with toxins. "What are you getting at?" Colman asked him. Micky said, "Some of your brother's problems ... It sounds like surgery could have helped at least a. waited neither a lady nor a tiger, but an altogether unique specimen. Leilani would have preferred the." He wasn't dead then," Geneva assured the girl. "He hadn't even begun to lose his hair yet." "If you say so. Do I have a choice?" a little, too, but then he realizes that her attention is elsewhere. "You've got it." Kath smiled. Mrs. Crayford glanced at the dock display on the room's companel. "Well then, I really must be getting along. I did so enjoy the trip and the company. We must do it again soon." She heaved herself to her feet and looked around. "Now, where did I leave my coat?" restless spirit guides the organization from which he so reluctantly departed, then two squads of FBI. spirit sewn to spirit with the strong thread of Curtis's reckless trust. "There is one thing which, in all fairness, I must repeat," Otto said from the screen. They turned and looked back at him. "We cannot alter our basic decision in any way. If Sterm becomes threatening, we will be forced to react. We cannot allow the fact that you might be- aboard the ship at the time to make any difference." Micky looked away from Geneva, because she didn't want to talk about her past. Not here, not now. Adam waved an arm resignedly. "Okay, okay. Never mind the sackcloth-and-ashes act. How about cleaning it up?" blurred, and she heard vintage feeling wash through her words. "I could hope . . . one day I might be. didn't have any real passion left; drugs of infinite variety had scorched away all her passion, leaving her. Currently, however, a sense of inadequacy so overwhelmed her that she had no capacity for shame. In. The killers had been even closer on his trail than he'd feared. What he sensed, stepping into that upstairs. Bernard shook his head again. "I don't know what you , - mean. The Kuan-yin can't fire effectively, it' & eclipsed frowt

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