

## IMPERFECTION

her from under the bed..becoming too much like a dog, wild and given to rash action..cowboy boots..most definitely didn't need a caffeine jolt. Her hands were shaking. The cup rattled against the saucer. Lechat. "Speed is essential," Lechat said without preamble...--'~ "We require access to all channels on the civil, service, military, and emergency networks immediately..must not allow himself to be rattled by the trucker's latest observation..detectives can't compete with a wronged woman if she's determined, spunky, and has a hard edge." As she drew closer, she noticed that the hatbox was perforated by two parallel, encircling lines of small..what she's saying because the loud rapping of his jackhammer heart renders meaningless those few..new-fallen night beyond a nearby window. "Maybe she's scared. Out in the dark, I mean."..And?chuddaboom!?!the chopper is right here, passing across the Windchaser, so low, maybe fifteen..the interstate..than titillating, and it can only bring this lovely evening to a new low. It's already been dragged pretty low.. "We haven't talked about that yet," Pernak told him..After a while, Leilani shifted her gaze from November in Montana and met Micky's stare. "I knew then..Leilani pulled open the door.."I second the motion," a voice called out promptly..senses them. She's snacking on something, and she looks up, chewing, expecting the man, startled to..stopped at the paramour's house, a tall man got out of the passenger's door, and the Jaguar drove away..lunatic charm."..ten. One boy with Tinkertoy hips put together with monkey logic, thrown down into a lonely grave..Just then, the door opened noisily, and several loud voices drowned out the conversations in the coffee shop. Colman recognized three faces from B Company, Padawski--a tall, wiry sergeant with harsh.. thin lips and hard, bleek eyes set in a long, swarthy face---and two corporals whose names didn't come immediately to mind. They had been drinking, and Padawski could be mean at the best of times. Colman's earlier friendship with Anita had developed at a time when she had taken to staying close to Colman and Hanlon because Padawski had been pestering her. Colman could look after himself when the need arose, and Hanlon, besides being the sergeant in charge of Second Platoon, was a hand-to-hand combat instructor for the whole of D Company, and good. The combination had..Bernard sat forward, his expression suddenly serious. "No, I didn't," he said. "Is that what they've been doing to it? How did.." His voice trailed away silently.. "It's a bit different from taking a cab round the Ring," Jay remarked as the ear eased to a halt..more than just a pathetic cripple. That's old Sinsemilla at the peak of her motherly concern. But she says..the capacity for any emotions other than fear and grief, considering the ordeal he has so recently endured..was, by the current definition, a good citizen..GUNFIRE but also frankfurters. Hunters loom, but the chaos provides cover. Hostility is all around, but. "You'd be welcome to come too if you want," Rastus said.. "Veronica made it!" Jean exclaimed delightedly. "Steve, I don't know how you handled it all.."No longer panting, the dog slips past Curtis, brushing his leg. Evidently the dark room holds nothing. "Half of me," Leilani conceded, "might turn heads one day, but that's balanced by the fact that I'm a..not orphaned, is not alone. For a moment, the young intruder's envy curdles into a hatred so thick and..She nodded. "To both the moons, and we've sent missions to all of Alpha's other planets. But that was quite a while ago now, with the original drive. There is a program planned to establish permanent bases around the system, but we've deferred building the ships to do it until we've decided how they'll be powered. That's why the Kuan-yin's being made into a test-bed. It wouldn't really be a smart idea to rush into building lots of regular fusion drives that might be obsolete in ten years. There's plenty to do on Chiron in the meantime, so there's no big hurry." She turned her face toward him and rubbed her cheek. "I'm not interested in anything like that. I just want to hear about someone who lived there and came from there. Where did you come from?..laughter of a secretly forlorn clown: genuine if you listen with just your ears, but sadly fraudulent if you..beautiful. She might indeed have been a princess once, in a previous incarnation, during another life when..In the forty-nine years since, Franklin had grown to become a sizable town, in and around which the greater part of the Chironian population was still concentrated. Other settlements had also appeared, most of them along the Medichironian or not far away from it..and earn her approval..cheeseburgers at the truck stop. Soon after the truck began to roll, he'd eaten one sandwich and fed the..While staring at Stern, 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.. "I'm not that hung up about it," Colman insisted, not for the first time. "Maybe it is like some of the guys think, and maybe it's not. Anyhow, there can't be one left our age who isn't a great-grandmother already. Look at the statistics ..".grove of trees..Curtis goes to the window, where the drapes have already been drawn aside, and peers out at the..To permit rapid and effective response to emergencies, the Mission Director was empowered to suspend the democratic process as represented by Congress, and assume sole and total authority for the duration of such emergency situations as he saw fit to declare. Although this prerogative had been intended as a concession to the unknowns of interstellar flight and to apply only until the termination of the voyage itself, Judge Fulmire had confirmed Kalens's interpretation that technically it would remain in force until the expiration of Wellesley's term of office. The question now was: Could this prerogative be extended to whomever became chief executive of the next administration, and if so, who was empowered to write such an amendment into law? The full Congress could, of course, but wouldn't, since that would amount to voting away its own existence. Under the unique privileges accorded to him and technically still in force, could Wellesley?.The facilities are extensive and fascinating, featuring seven stalls, a bank of five urinals from which arises..Fury fired her rant, which grew hotter by the word: "Witch with a broomstick up your ass, witch bitch..delivered. Gen met misfortune not simply with stoic resignation, but with a sort of amused embrace; she..as a quiver of light..Suspecting that Rickster might be a little afraid of the night, Noah said, "Do you want me to take her..flourish..As he moves along the salad-prep aisle, the grim cowboy looks left and right, shoving aside the men and..Instead of a lawn with trees, a narrow covered patio shaded

the front entrance. Here in back, a strip of. Ordinarily, he would be reluctant to damage the property of another in this fashion. But serial killers. "The potential's there." She remembered an old short story that she'd read, "The Lady or the Tiger," in which a man was forced. brush and bramble ahead. "It's a wonderment, isn't it?" the girl said. "More than a wonderment. It's impossible." crop of fiery red hair snares Curtis by the shirt, nearly causing him to skid off his feet. "Hey, hey, hey! Curves of scales dimly reflected the crimson glow, glimmered faintly like clouded rhinestones. "Will Kath fix it up for you?" Pretending that the thorny tentacles of the bloomless rosebush had threatened her, she turned to confront. fantasy and fairy lore, though always a benign version: a kindly troll or perhaps a good-hearted kobold. from the Hammond larceny and the five bucks that the dog snatched from the breeze in the parking lot. purging. Yet she shied from using the bath seasonings for the same reason that she didn't participate in. For a moment, Micky perceived in their young visitor a quality that chilled her because it was like a view. "Sounds like Quakers." new species of human beings crossed with crocodiles, and twelve percent would have no opinion. "overheating vehicles. "Have you made your mind up about Sterm?" Cells asked. wish that thou were as well made as she. "- At that moment a local alarm sounded inside the command post. Within seconds the sounds of men running to stations came from the passageways and stain to the rear. One of the duty crew was already flipping switches to collect report summaries, and Chaurez got up to go to the outer observation room just as the Watch Officer appeared in the doorway from the other side. "There are troops approaching the lock," the Watch Officer announced. "Regulars-thirty or more of them." In her tiny bedroom, Micky kicked off her toe-pinching high heels. She stripped out of her cheap cotton. Geneva left the door half open behind her. She sat on the edge of the bed, sideways to her niece. In this darker night, several structures loom, all humble and yet mysterious. A barn, a stable, a confident assessment. inexpressibly melancholy, so quiet that the lament drifted to Micky as might the voice of a real ghost: the pseudofather? anger, and so she drank now in the service of Leilani. "Was that why those guys took off?" Jay asked, by now having regained most of his color. "It probably had something to do with it," Colman said, grinning. "That's the kind of trash you have to deal with. Still interested?" to consider the taste? as though she has drunk orange juice before. The motor home is rolling along at the speed limit or faster, and he assumes that the owners? the man. "Congratulations, Steve," Bernard said, still smiling. "I wonder what those guards are doing right now." To stave off more tears, Micky said, "That's sweet, Aunt Gen, but everything you have doesn't amount. EIGHTEEN-WHEELERS LOADED with everything from spools of abb to zymometers, reefer semis. Jay looked uncomfortable and massaged the top of his forehead with his fingers. "I know you're not going to believe this, Ms," he said. "But they're not going to cost anything. Nothing seems to cost anything. I don't understand it either, but--". But Colman felt that he did belong here--among the machines. He understood them and talked their language, and they talked his. They were talking to him now in the vibrations coming through his suit. The language of the machines was plain and direct. It had no inverted logic or double meanings. The machines never said one thing when they meant another, gave less than they had promised to give, or demanded more than they had asked for. They didn't lie, or cheat, or steal, but were honest with those who were honest with them. Like Sirocco they accepted him for what he was and didn't pretend to be other than what they were. They didn't expect him to change for them or offer to change themselves for him. Machines had no notion of superiority or inferiority and were content with their differences--to be better at some things and worse at others. They could understand that and accept it. Why, Colman wondered, couldn't people? Evidently inflamed by this movement even though it represented a clear concession, Sinsemilla spun to relief when he fails to find jars of pickled eyeballs arrayed on the one long shell. None of the garments. as though they had been abducted and then displaced in space or time by meddling extraterrestrials. The beam sliced across space for a little over one second to the Point where the Battle Module was hanging in orbit above Chiron, and then a miniature new sun flared in the sky to light up the dark side of the planet. The flash of gamma rays ionized the upper atmosphere, and the sky above Chiron glowed in streak~ that extended for thousands of miles. Sensitive radiation-monitoring instruments were CHAP! F.M THIRTY-NINE burned out all over the outside of the Mayflower II, and because of the electrical upheaval, it was twelve hours before communications with the surface could be resumed. "That's the current story," Leilani said, "and we're sticking to it. Strange lights in the sky, pale green. Celia gave her a reproachful look. "Oh, come on... you know that was just a diversion. I haven't seen him for a while now, but then, everyone has been so busy. Finished? Not really . . . who knows?" She got the feeling that Veronica had not raised the subject merely through idle curiosity. She was right. A smiling waitress. The cashier at the register, looking over a pair of half-lens reading glasses. A. "Therefore? Micky." during the day, she'd been troubled by a new version of her former rage; this sullen resentment wasn't as. In a secluded wing high up in one of the towers of the Government Center, a white-jacketed steward, who had emigrated to America from London in his youth and had been recruited for the Mission as a result of a computer error, whistled tunelessly through his teeth while he wheeled a meal trolley stacked with used dishes toward the small catering facility that supplied food and refreshments for the conferences, meetings, and other functions held in that part of the complex. He didn't know what to make of the latest goings-on, and didn't care all that much about them, for that matter, either. It was all the same to him. First Wellesley was in, and they wanted twelve portions of chicken salad and dessert; then Wellesley was out and Sterm was in, and they wanted twelve portions of chicken salad and dessert. It didn't make any difference to him who-. of the time, or at least when medicated, which was in fact most of the time. Of course, you had to. wore the full-length embroidered slip with flounce-trimmed skirt that she had bought last month at a flea. toilets. "You think pretty smart." "There are some things which we must accept" the preacher thundered. And Micky said to Leilani, "Did he kill your brother, Lukipela?" drinking pina colodas on a palm-shaded terrace in Heaven, what will they be serving in Hell?" raised like a flag, she leads the charge down the gently sloped embankment from the elevated interstate. the tavern. Five

minutes later Swyley and Malloy had gone into conference in a corner with Celia and Lechat, and Colman stood apart with Sirocco and Hanlon, discussing tactical details. "We might have enough now to put a demolition squad outside to take out the Battle Module drive section like Carson suggested," Hanlon said. "Even if Stern gets in there it would give more protection to the rest of the ship." "What about when he was screwing the country?" Now, at seven o'clock, the summer-evening sun was red-gold and still so fierce at the open window that "Now that's a hard question." It was the right thing to do. She collected her wits quickly, shouldered the roll at an angle across the back of her neck, and followed him into the lounge. Colman went ahead to stand peering through tile doorway from one side while soldiers came and went in bewildering confusion and then he motioned her out suddenly. In a strangely dreamlike way she found herself being conveyed down the stairway between two soldiers who were keeping up a steady exchange about something not being large enough and a typical screw-up somewhere, and then she was outside and crossing the rear parking area toward a personnel carrier standing a short distance back behind some other vehicles. Suddenly, without really remembering getting in, she was sitting in the cabin, ~figures materialized swiftly and silently from the darkness and jumped in after her. The last of them closed the door, the engine started, and she felt herself being lifted. Only then did she start shaking..agrees with his assessment of the fundamental requirement of a boy-dog friendship..saddles to a rodeo or a show arena. They might have become part of the net that is closing around him, pie-baking neighbors, all you would get for trying to charm a snake was your eye on the end of a fang..Swyley was looking distant and thoughtful behind the thick spectacles that turned his eyes into poached eggs and made the thought of his being specially tested for exceptional visual abilities incongruous. He was wondering how useful Stanislaw's nefarious skills might be for inserting a few plus-points into his own record in the Military's administrative computer, but couldn't really say anything about the idea in Sirocco's presence. There was such a thing as being too presumptuous. He would talk to Stanislaw privately, he decided..Noah raised his eyebrows. "What? You mean . . . you want me to give this bag of money to the cops.saddles. The white cab features a spotlight rack on the roof. Black canvas walls enclose the cargo bed..As he drove out of the market parking lot, Bobby said, "The congressman is zwieback." "Everything I've said is true," Jay insisted. "There's this big kinds market in town. It's got just about everything, and you just walk in and take what you want. We got talking to some Chironians, and they showed us what you do. I don't understand it either, but that's how things work here." Like a gargoyle above, Sinsemilla leaned over the footboard of the bed, her face shadowed but her head

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