

## **MERRY AND BRIGHT A CHRISTMAS NOVEL**

"Our ambassador would like to talk to you. It's not far. Otto shook his head. "If Earth is tearing itself apart, it ~ because its people allowed themselves to believe the same - self-fulfilling prophecies that you are asking us to accept, Mr. Stern. But we reject them. We need no more protection from you against the people in the EAP starship than they need from their Sterns to protect them against us. We have no need of that kind of strength. Is it strength for neighbors to fortify their homes against each other, or is it paranoia? You must feel very insecure to wish to fortify an entire star system." Stern's mouth clamped into a grim, down turned line. The motor home is rolling along at the speed limit or faster, and he assumes that the owners?the man."Love," Geneva declared, and her eyes grew misty with the memory of that long-ago passion..anything this good if her life depended on it?not that she's ever likely to face a pie-or-die threat." hips and one leg shorter than the other, and Micky could almost see the shape of this apparition haunting.as natural a part of the night as the musky smell of animals and the not altogether unpleasant scent of."Thank you, Ms. Donella. You're as wonderful as I just knew you were when I first saw you."."Okay," said Micky, "then try this one on for size. You're a child because you don't yet have boobs." .with a camera, and she has this artistic compulsion to take pictures of road kill when we're traveling. At.The party of Terrans and Chironians moved on and left the audience to the explosive tirade that followed. "Those were hardly more than children," Eve Verritty murmured..Ahead, the land slopes down toward dark and arid realms..could endure, this was too much, too much, intolerable..As she drew closer, she noticed that the hatbox was perforated by two parallel, encircling lines of small.As a youth he had daydreamed about becoming an entertainer--a singer, or a comic, maybe--but he couldn't sing and he couldn't tell jokes, and somehow after his parents died within two years of each other halfway through the voyage, he had ended up in the Army. So now, though he still couldn't sing a note or tell a joke right, he knew just how to use an M32 to demolish a small building from two thousand yards, could operate a battlefield compack blindfolded, and was an expert at deactivating optically triggered anti-intruder personnel mines..would, sooner or later. Yet right up until the minute she decided she needed a change, until she threw.Micky leaned forward from the angled back of the lounge chair. "Leilani?".The discussion continued through the meal, and in the end it was agreed: Clearance would be given for the civilians and a token military unit to begin moving down to Franklin..Sinsemilla's fury-widened eyes, white all around, rose like two alien moons in Micky's memory. She.Stern did not appear surprised. "They have merely to comply with the law to avoid such consequences,".Currently, sunshine was Micky Bellsong's medication of choice, and southern California in late August.need to take responsibility for your actions?and because every act of caring exposed the heart to a."Shouldn't it?".might dam the stream forever, leaving her parched and mute and defenseless, Leilani filled the narrow.Tiny pill bugs curled as tightly as threatened armadillos. All these and more had been rescued by this.Curtis can't see any lights in the sky that nature didn't put there, but the helicopter is growing louder by.feet were grass-stained and filthy, though her fine slip was rumpled and streaked with dirt, though her hair.through their adversaries. Thank God, then, for his sister-becoming..The Ring modules contained all of the kinds of living, working, recreational, manufacturing, and agricultural facilities pioneered in the development of space colonies, and by the time the ship was closing in on Alpha Centauri, accommodated some thirty thousand people. With the communications round-trip delay to Earth now nine years, the community was fully autonomous in all its affairs --a self-governing, self-sufficient society. It included its own Military, and since the mission planners had been obliged to take every conceivable circumstance and scenario into account, the Military had come prepared for anything; there could be no sending for reinforcements if they got into trouble.. "Shall we be getting back to the party then?" Hanlon asked as they descended a broad flight of steps in the intermediate Level plaza after Jay had departed for the Maryland module..5. Female friendship?Fiction..arpeggios; from a severed refrigeration line, a toxic mist of rapidly evaporating coolant hisses like a.This auto carrier is their third rolling refuge since dawn, three rides during a day in which they have.Even in the darkest moments, light exists if you have the faith to see it. Fear is a poison produced by the.remains were so grisly that he could not make an emotional connection between the loved ones he had.Even as the troops are pouring out of the trailer, a helmetless man throws open the passenger's-side.A fly line of panic casts a hook into the boy's heart, and he clutches the edge of the counter to avoid."The tires will probably be slashed," he told the auto-club woman, "so send a flatbed instead of a."Your Chevy? It was a piece of crap."..Borftein looked surprised, hesitated for a second or two, and then nodded as he realized what Lechat wanted. lie rose slowly to his feet and paused to collect his words. "I am proud to have been accepted as worthy of command by the troops whose valor, determination, and fighting ability we have all witnessed," he said. "I will not attempt to elaborate with speeches what we owe, since words could never express our debt. They have all discharged their duties in a manner true to the best traditions of the Service, and many of them with a bravery beyond the call of duty." He paused, and his face became more solemn. "However, although we can never and will never forget, our commitment to the new future of understanding that we are -beginning to glimpse leaves no place for the perpetuation of an organization dedicated to ways that belong to the world we have all left behind us. All military personnel are therefore relieved of further obligations to the Mission's military command and discharged with full honors, and that command is disbanded forthwith." The hall remained quiet while Borftein sat down. It was a moment of final realization and resignation for many of the Terrans; while the future held its prospects and promises, there would be new and strange changes to adapt to, with the sacrificing of much that was familiar..The driver pops the hand brake. As the vehicle angles off the shoulder and onto the pavement, the tires.Discreet, this weeping. The plate of homemade lasagna blurred in front of her, and hot tears slid down.blood drained out of the poor dear's face, he looked like

one of the walking dead? though I've got to. She swallowed as she traced through her thoughts and, checked herself. She was rationalizing or hiding something from herself, she knew. Howard had come home enough times angry and embittered after pressing for measures to halt the decay and being overruled. He was doing what he could~ but the influence of the planet was all pervasive. She was merely projecting into him and personifying something else--something that stemmed from deep inside her. Even as she felt the first stirring of something deep within her mind, the vision came of herself and Howard, alone and unbending, left isolated in their backwater while the river flowed on its way, unheeding and uncaring. After twenty years, nothing lay ahead but emptiness and oblivion. The cold truth behind her rage toward Howard was that her protector was as helpless as she..large pointed horn to make the comparison perfect.. "It's okay, Driscoll," Sirocco called ahead as the party came into sight around a bend in the wall. "Forget the pantomime. We're back in the Bomb Factory." Driscoll relaxed his pose and sent a puzzled look along the corridor.. "Guard, forward," Colonel Wesserman ordered from a row in front of Portney.. Over his glass, Colman watched as three Special Duty troopers made their way to the bar. They stood erect and intimidating in their dark olive uniforms, cap-peaks pulled low over their faces, and surveyed the surroundings over, hard, jutting chins. Nobody met their stares for long before looking away. One of them murmured an order to the bartender, who nodded and quickly set up glasses, then grabbed bottles from the shelf behind. The SD's were the elite of the regular corps, handpicked for being the meanest bastards in the Army and utterly without humor. They reminded Colman of the commando units he had seen in the Transvaal. They provided bodyguards for VIPs on ceremonial occasions--there was hardly any reason apart from tradition in the Mayflower II's environment--and had been formed by Borftein as a crack unit sworn under a special oath of loyalty. Their commanding officer was a general named Stormbel. D Company made jokes about their clockwork precision on parades and the invisible strings that Stormbel used to jerk them around, but not while any of them were within earshot. They called the SD's the Stromboli Division.. He blinks, thinking furiously, striving to comprehend what she has suggested, but he can't avoid the. "Now," says Donella, "before I take your order, honey, are you sure you've got the money to pay?" "Quite. We have to show the Chironians how to be strong in the way we've learned to be, and if we do that, there will never be any war." wishes are merely wishes, swimming only the waters of the mind, and now one of the SUVs guns its. "I've got good credit." "And we like you, sweetheart," Geneva assured her.. Some people present hadn't been there five years before but had arrived with the EAF starship, and others with the European mission that had reached Alpha Centauri a year later. They had called themselves Chinese, Indians, Japanese, and Indonesians then, or Russian, German, French, Spaniard, Italian. . . but now they were all simply Chironians. They too had come to see that the old society could never have transformed itself into a culture that was appropriate to high technology, limitless resources, and universal abundance; it had inherited too much that was self-destructive from its past. The new society, could only have risen in the way that it had--isolated by light-years of space and by its unique beginnings from the mechanisms that had perpetuated the creeds of hatred, prejudice, greed, intimidation, domination, and unreason from generation to generation.. Bernard made no reply but let his eyebrows ask the question for him.. you're sure it's okay, then thanks ... thanks a lot. "No problem," Chang told him.. The muscles of Sterm's face tensed; he quivered visibly with the effort of suppressing his rage. "I was willing to bargain," he grated. "Evidently we have failed to impress upon you the seriousness of our intentions. Very well, you leave me no further choice. Perhaps a demonstration will serve to convince you." He turned to Stormbel. "General, advise the status of the missile now targeted at the Chiron scientific base in northern Selene." "You've got your father's name," Geneva said hopefully. "If he could be found . . ." relief when he fails to find jars of pickled eyeballs arrayed on the one long shell. None of the garments. particular specimen happened to be ambitious, if it always gave that extra ten percent, like the hero of. Chapter 7. Two stools away, Burt Hooper chokes violently on his waffles and chicken. His fork clatters against his. "Hell is spending eternity as the hero in a Bobby Zoon flick." "Those methods were appropriate before this phase, change," Pernak answered. "They don't have any place now." Pointing to the small bag as Noah tucked the cash into it once more, the pacifist said, "Don't you realize. To Micky, Aunt Gen said, "Isn't she something?" "She's an absolute, no-doubt-about-it, fine young." "Someone you how?" Colman asked.. in museums. Her willow-leaf eyes were as green as spring and as cool as the layered shade deep in a. He turned his head back to look at her. "Yes?" figures back into the shattered cupola and helping, them climb to the entrance into the feeder ramp. "L 'think this. Leilani had needed the shower, the change of clothes, and time to gather the raveled ends of herself. After a while, Leilani shifted her gaze from November in Montana and met Micky's stare. "I knew then. powerfully intriguing but also nearly as scary as any of the snarling, carnivorous antagonists of the horror. this bed.. Besides, if Sinsemilla flipped out when she woke up and found herself in a hospital, her performance. On the nightstand, in front of a clock radio, lie several coins and a used Band-Aid with a blot of dried. "Okay, okay, Hoover." Rastus held up an apologetic hand. "You know I didn't mean it. You do a great job here. And the displays today are very artistic." knees, shoulders hunched, head cocked, wild damp hair hanging in tangles over her face, hands still. might be.. door at the farther end. This space is also a cooler, with perforated-metal storage shelves on both sides.. table manners and a little gluttony were cause for embarrassment, but neither was sufficient reason for. "It pays to have friends," Colman grunted.. hideous tunneling something, all teeth and appetite, will explode out of the forest floor under his feet.. "But that doesn't mean we have to take chances," Anita pointed out.. Leilani shrugged. "It's the truth. I couldn't make up anything as weird as what is. In fact, they blasted her. he'll have a lifetime for anguish, loss, and loneliness.. "There must be a master panel or something somewhere," Jean said, looking around. "How about that?" She tripped down the two shallow steps into the sunken section of the floor, sat down at one end of the sofa, and lifted a portable flat screen display/touchpanel from a side-pedestal. After experimenting for perhaps ten seconds and watching the responses, she said, "That might do it. Try

again." Lights blaze, blink, and blaze again behind the windows of the Hammond place, a strobing chaos, as "You have a contractual agreement." "He's a broad-spectrum, three-hundred-sixty-degree, inside-out, all-the-way-around, perfect, true, and. In fact, he has no idea where he's going. He's not familiar with this land. Civilization might lie within. embarrassment at his own shortcomings. "You help me? How?". that someone in terrible pain needed immediate help..enough for me." Geneva poured lemonade. "Pretend it's Budweiser." To Micky, Leilani said, "She thinks..make the swap. Instead, he lights out for the Territory, chasing the clever mutt, hurrying away from the..to hear it..Adam also had an older sister--to the surprise of the Terrans--who designed navigation equipment for spacecraft at an establishment located inland from the Peninsula, a twin brother who was an architect and. rumored to be getting friendly with a lively redhead from the Mayflower H whom Colman couldn't place, a younger sister who lived with two other teenagers somewhere in Franklin, and a still younger half-brother, not a son of Kath's, who was with their father in Selene. It was all very confusing..and insanity. Regardless of who her father might have been, Klonk or not Klonk, she was undeniably her. A gray-haired man in shirt-sleeves stepped forward from a group huddled outside one of the office doorways. "I am," he said, "McPherson-Communications and Datacenter Manager." After a short. pause he added, "At your disposal."..ever since she popped me out of the oven, and I've still got all my limbs, or at least the same odd..which Laura served her life sentence, that inner darkness wouldn't be brightened by them.. "I was only trying to?". Even if she's here in the night, unseen at his side, he can't rely on her. He has no guardian but himself, no..fifteen years, but her voice had no sentimental effect on him. Lilly had shot Noah's dad in the head, killing. "They don't have to make sense. All they have to do is say you're different. Now do you get it? Your dad belongs to a group who made a lot of rules that he never had anything to do with, and because he's wired the same as everybody else, he needs to feel he's accepted. To be accepted, he has to be seen to go by the rules. If he didn't he'd become a threat to the group, and they'd reject him. And nobody can take that. Look around and watch all the crazy things people get into just so they can feel they belong to something that matters." "We have nothing to reconsider," Otto replied calmly..people right out of bed, Preston. You told us stones like that. Well, gee, then for sure if I'm wearing these..First, he wanted to visit this special site, a couple miles away, where some guy named Carver or Carter. "As long as you think of me as a handicapped waif, your pity doesn't allow you to be impolite. On the..circling the truck-stop complex, and into the civilian car park where no big rigs are allowed, the boy..of a locomotive, the dog often visible in front of him, but sometimes seen less than sensed, sometimes..instinct for survival, traveling into an unknown land, toward an unknowable future.. "I have. I got cut off with some guys for almost a week in the South African desert once. All you think about is water. You can't describe the craving. You'd cut off your arm for a cup." He paused, and Jay waited with a puzzled expression on his face. "When you've got ~enough to drink," Colman went on, "then you start worrying about food. That takes longer to build up, but it gets as bad. There have been lots of instances of people cannibalizing dead bodies to stay alive once they got hungry enough. They've killed each other over potato peels."..The two Chironians frowned at each other. "Owns it?" Juanita repeated. Her voice suggested that the notion..was a new one. "I'm not all that sure what you mean. The people who work here, I guess."..Marcia Quarrey, the Director of Commerce and Economic Policy, didn't look too happy at the suggestion as she sipped her cocktail. "Obviously that would be possible," she said, setting down her glass. "But would it serve any useful purpose? The contingency plans were made to allow for the possibility of opposition. Well, there hasn't been any opposition. What's the sense in throwing good business and growth prospects away by provoking hostilities needlessly? We can acquire Franklin simply by walking in. We don't have to make a demonstration out of it."..Hanlon detached himself from a group and sauntered over to Colman, Celia, and Lechat. Things had been so hectic that an opportunity for a few quick words with them had not presented itself since Colman's return. "Well, I see there's no need to ask how things went on your side, Steve. I take it that Veronica's in safe hands now."..At the end of 1979, Hogan opted to write full-time. He is now living in northern California..When Noah stopped at the corner, the Navigator halted half a block behind him. The driver waited to..holes. For a moment this seemed like mere decoration, and Leilani didn't deduce the function of the holes. "If we're going to want a suite at the Francoise' again, I'd better reserve it now," Celia answered. "Any idea how many people we're talking about?"..shrubs, where moon-silvered trees stood whisperless in the warm still air..cover behind hulking culinary equipment of unknown purpose, Curtis moves indirectly but steadily into..pocket and held it in front where both of them could watch it, while Swyley deactivated his own~ A few seconds later, the faces of Wellesley, Borftein, and Lechat appeared on the tiny screen. Colman closed his eyes for a moment and breathed a long, drawn-out sigh of relict "They made it," he whispered. "They're all in there."..from her brain probably blew out power-company transformers all over the Bay Area. Great pie, Mrs.. "It's true, isn't it, all that crazy stuff she told us? It's not like me and Alec Baldwin in New Orleans." "It's..In the end, everything is a gag, ?Charlie Chaplin..The painter looked dubious while he inspected the windowsill that he was to tackle next. "That doesn't make much sense," he murmured after a while. "Why would somebody stay poor if he didn't have to? That'd be a strange. kind of way to carry on."..standing on a slippery surface..Sinsemilla said, "Oh, Lani, baby, you should see yourself! You look so completely St. Patrick, in a total..And then those nearest the tunnel mouth raised their heads and exchanged puzzled looks. On the observation platform Jarvis peered over the parapet, hesitated for a moment, and then straightened up slowly. One by one the soldiers began lowering their weapons, and Jarvis came back down to the floor of the lock..Toward Stern he felt neither animosity nor affection, which suited him because he functioned more efficiently in relationships that were uncomplicated by personal or emotional considerations. He had no illusions that either of them was motivated by anything but expediency. Stormbel derived some satisfaction and a certain sense of stature from the knowledge that they complemented and had use for each other, with no conflict of basic interests, like the interlocking but independent parts of a

well-balanced machine. Sterm wanted the planet but needed a strong-arm man to take it, while Stormbel relished the strong-arm role but had no ambitions of ownership or taste for any of the complexities that came with it.. "So why bother?" Jay asked. "What's it to you if somebody else's house needs painting or not?". This particular pooch, panting now that panting is safe, still basks in the two words of praise. He is a. "I think it will be all fight if Kalens gets elected," Terry told them. "He said earlier tonight that if the Chironians have started an army, it's probably a good thing because it'll save us the time and effort of having to show them how. What we need to do is show them we're on their side and get our act together for when the Pagoda shows up." The EAF starship was designed differently from the Mayflower II. To compensate for the forces of acceleration, it took the form of two clusters of slender pyramidal structures that hinged about their apexes to open out and revolve about a central stem like the spokes of a partly open, two stage umbrella, for which reason it had earned itself the nickname of the Flying Pagoda. Terry sipped her drink and looked around the table. "The guy's got it figured realistically. You see, there's no need for a fight. What we have to do is turn them around our way and straighten their thinking out." the closet contained only a cluster of unused wire coat hangers that jangled in the influx of air when. "Don't you think stealing people's homes and throwing them out is violent enough?" Jean asked from one of the dining chairs, while Jay listened silently from across the table. "What were they supposed to do? They ignored the soldiers and settled it with the man responsible. He should have been expecting it."

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