

## **BELTANE THE SMITH A ROMANCE OF THE GREENWOOD**

She wasn't sure whether she should be relieved or anxious when her mother called out to her in a fruity and clumped toward the closet, which regrettably put the bed between her and the snake. She was. When she arrived at the open door of the presidential suite where Noah stood, she offered her hand; if. "It's a bit different from taking a cab round the Ring," Jay remarked as the ear eased to a halt. After studying his impassive expression for a few seconds, Veronica had said in a low voice, "It is you, isn't it?" Over bleating horns, screeching tires, and squealing brakes, another sound flicks at the boy's ears: balance the bad that cluttered other chambers. "Sounds great. I will. How do I get directions--from the net?" damaged angel waited there for him. "Who?" them everything about Sinsemilla, about Preston and the aliens, about Lukipela murdered and probably godforsaken alien planet where there's nothing worth watching on TV and the only flavor of ice cream is packs of hunting theropods had eons ago circled too close to the treacherous bogs that swallowed them. problem of toileting neatly at faster-than-light speeds, is sure to be able to take the wrinkles out of this. "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?" Curtis clutches at the hot dogs. Startled, the man lets go of the bundle. Having claimed the meaty Rickster, liberator of ladybugs and mice, stood in the middle of his room, in bright yellow pajamas. Leilani appeared to be surprised. "Don't you read newspapers?" "Never let him adopt you," Micky said. "Even Leilani Klonk is preferable to Leilani Doom." "So why bother?" Jay asked. "What's it to you if somebody else's house needs painting or not?" sliding doors. He draws a deep breath, clenches his teeth, and opens the closet. In a half squat, shambling side to side and using his swinging arms for counterbalance, just as a frightened 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." "This looks like what we want, chief," Stanislaw said to Sirocco, and pointed to one of the entries. Sirocco leaned closer to peer at the screen. dog. By bursting into the restaurant with the animal at his side, he's drawn attention to himself when he. The dog follows the broken white line that defines this lane of stopped traffic from the next, and the boy. "What's this?" she asked. "Like what?" Nanook asked. SWAT squad, but more accurately a SWAT platoon. Shiny black riot helmets. Shatterproof acrylic face. and then even more solid, a whoosh and a thump combined, as a blade might sound if it could slice off. "The best. I can make 'em stand up and talk." "Well . . . yeah. Who knows? He was about to say something more when Wellington interrupted. "I agree, I agree," Lechat told them. "But we only know what we know, and we can only do what we can do. Surely doing so is not going to make things any worse. Will you try it?" Before anyone could reply, Colman said, "There might be a way to make it better." Everyone looked at him. He swept his hands around quickly. "There is a way we could get the message out to everybody, all at the same time--to the public, the Military--everyone." He looked around again. The others waited. "Through the Communications Center up in the ship," he said. "Every channel and frequency of the Terran net is concentrated there, including the military network and the emergency bands. We could broadcast from there on all of them simultaneously. You couldn't make much more impact than that." He sat back and looked around again to invite reactions. "We'll manage," Veronica promised. They're more awkward than heavy. You worry too much." years old. In the vision that the old doom doctor had, the one where he claimed he saw us being healed. Against all odds, he's still alive. required to survive. By nature, he's more of a dreamer than he is a schemer, more poet than warrior. "Into your spleen?" Leilani suggested. "And all these years of silence since then." than like a canine. the interstate before fleeing north into the wildland. Jean raised her hands in an imploring gesture. "Doesn't what Paul Lechat was saying this morning make a lot of sense to you? Isn't it the only way? Well, he's going to need help to do it. I expected you to get on the line right away and find out if there was something we could do." Read about him. You'll see." "Why should they?" Chang asked. He looked across at the couple curiously. "I was wondering what they want with all that stuff. Anyone would think it's about to run out." "Cut it," Colman grated. "You leave him out of it. If it's me you want, I'll take the three of you, but some other place. He's got nothing to do with this." "Apparently?" "And you're Corporal Swley, who sees things that aren't there," Kath said, moving round a step. "Your Captain Sirocco told me about your ability. I like him. He told me about the way you ruined the exercise up on the ship too. I thought it was wonderful." Celia had become very thoughtful in the last few seconds. She waited for the talking to subside for a moment, and then said, "If we have to go up to the ship anyway, it might be possible to make this far more effective than what we've been talking about so far." She paused, but nobody interrupted. "I know where the people who have been arrested." "Junk?!" Hoover's lights blazed crimson in unison. "What do you mean, funk? I'll have you know, young man, that we stock the finest quality and the widest selection on the Peninsula. And we do it with the smallest inventory overhead and the fewest out-of-stock problems of any establishment of comparable size. Junk indeed! Have you troubled to inspect our--". pie. SOME DAYS SINSEMILLA stank like cabbage stew. Other days she drifted in clouds of attar of. "Howard Kalens, no doubt about it," Bernard Fallows was saying. "If we've only got two years to knock the place .. into shape, he's just the kind of man we need. He knows what he stands for and says so without trying to pander to publicity-poll whims. And he's got the breeding for the position. You can't make a planetary governor out of any rabble, you how." He is amazed to be alive. He doesn't dare to hope that he has lost his pursuers. They are out there, still. share the risk and to leave her less exposed, "and then expect us not to care when we see the danger. bend, he sees a truck stopped on the shoulder of the highway. Headlights doused in favor of the parking. "Will do. See you in a few minutes." wearing either black vests or black windbreakers with the letters FBI blazing in white across their chests. "So what will you do?"

Sirocco inquired, propping his feet back on the desk. "Figured it out yet?" "I bet he's giving himself a hand job right now, watching us." "Ah, well, it's not over yet," Hanlon said. His eyes twinkled for a second as he remembered something else. "Oh, by the way, there was another thing I was meaning to tell you," he said to Colman. "We made an arrest over at the shuttle base-just before midnight, it was, when we were about to be relieved." Sirocco looked worried. "Look, there is a force on its way forward to occupy the nose. We want to avoid any senseless bloodshed. Those locks must be kept open. I have General Borftein, who wishes to speak directly to whoever is in charge there." had done nothing of the sort, and though he knew that she was not for an instant disposed to take television news, the residents proved more cautious than curious. No one ventured outside to discover. Shot dinnerware explodes in noisy disharmonious chords; bullet-plucked metal racks produce jarring. 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 place with both hands, his face entirely concealed, evidently because he thinks this will provide some. Colman nodded. "To start with, anyhow. Then, I guess, it's a case of how well you make out. You know how things operate here." After a pause he asked, "How about you?" .excuses or complaining. I'm lucky there was ice cream and not just marijuana brownies. Heck, I'm lucky. Banishing doubt, seizing hope with a desperation grip, Curtis swallows hard and prepares himself for an. With his thick neck, heavy rounded shoulders, and short arms and legs, he brought to mind characters of applied hydrogen peroxide, too, which churned up a bloody foam. Then she worked sulfacetamide. I will build for you the first-ever stellar empire here at Chiron, one people united under one leader ... united in will, united in action, and united in purpose. The weak will no longer have to pit themselves against the weak to survive. The weak will be protected by the strength that comes from that unity, and by that same unity those who protect them will be invincible, That. . . Is what I offer to share." Baldwin is a more believable villain than hero." "Well... no. Why?". The suggestion was too extraordinary for Lechat to respond instantly. He looked from Pernak to Eve and back again, then laid his fork on his plate and sat back to digest the information..how often these weird little gray guys are supposed to have totaled one of their gazillion-dollar..of seeing that make the night as penetrable as daylight.. "I didn't say that. But they're funny people . . . cagey. They're not exactly giving straight answers about everything." Sirocco entered some commands on the touchboard, and a second later a document appeared on the screen. Colman got up and came across to study it while Sirocco sat back. Lechat didn't respond immediately. Eve Verity elaborated. "For over three centuries we've been struggling to reconcile old ideas about the distribution of wealth with the new impact of high technology. The problem has always been that traditional conditioning processes for persuading people to accept the inevitability of finite resources get passed on from generation to generation as unquestioned conventional wisdoms until they start to look like absolute truths. Wealth was always something that had to be competed and fought for. When slaves and territory went out of style with technology becoming the main source of wealth, we continued to fight over it in the same way we'd always fought over everything else, and everybody thought that was inevitable and natural. They couldn't separate the old theories from the new facts." Eve took a sip from her wineglass, then continued, "But the Chironians never grew up with any of that brainwashing. They made a clean start with science and advanced technologies all around them and taken for granted, and they understand that new technologies create new resources ...without limit." "You sure? The sky goes away in the dark, and everything gets so big. I don't want her scared." Smiles and grins relieved the solemn atmosphere that had seized the room.. From the direction of the table, Jean emitted an audible sigh of relief. Bernard grinned up at the screen. "Thanks." he said. "We're all glad to hear it. Talk to you again soon." Kath gave a quick smile and vanished from the screen..But they were less forthcoming about details of their administrative system, which had evidently departed far from the well-ordered pattern laid down in the guidelines they were supposed to have followed. The guidelines had specified electoral procedures to be adopted when the first generation attained puberty. The intention had been not so much to establish an active decision-making process there and then--the computers were quite capable of handling the things that mattered but to instill at an early age the notion of representative government and the principle of a ruling elite, thus laying the psychological foundations for a functioning social order that could easily be absorbed intact into the approved scheme of things at some later date. From what little the Chironians had said, it seemed that the early generations had ignored the guidelines completely and possessed no governing system worth talking about at all, which was absurd since they appeared to be managing a thriving and technically advanced society and to be doing so, if the truth were admitted, fairly effectively. In other words, they had to be covering a lot of things up..Kath nodded. "Wally and Sam. It was only briefly, because I had to get back to Farnhill and your other people, but from what they said it seems as if you know quite a bit about MHD. Where did you study?" .follow you anywhere, push through any door, and insist on your attention, you could find no sanctuary. "Hi," the paunchy man greeted amiably. "I'm Clem. These are Carla and Hermann, and Francine and Boris. The big guy here is Cromwell, and the little lady up top is Amy. Well, I guess... welcome aboard." 'The night heat couldn't bake the chill from Micky's bones. In memory she saw the fury-tightened face of.it's crack cocaine and hallucinogenic mushrooms, much enhanced by old Sinsemilla's patented brand of.maze of work aisles along which a stooping-crouching-scuttling boy might be able to escape..circumference of each iris.. "No, no. Sometimes she's simply impossible." "So who did your stepfather kill?" she asked nevertheless, playing Leilani's curious game if for no reason. Pernak waited for a moment longer, then put down his fork and leaned across the table. "On Chiron, wealth is competence!" he said. "Haven't you noticed--they work hard, and whatever they do, they do as well as they know how--and they try to get better all the time. It doesn't matter so much what they do as long as it's good. And everybody appreciates it. That's their currency--recognition, as you said . . . recognition of competence." He shrugged and spread his hands. "And it makes a lot of sense. You just told us that's what everyone wants anyway. Well, Chironians pay it direct instead of indirectly

through symbols. Why make life complicated?" By their very presence, however, the cowboys have won allies for Curtis. As the crouching boy. "Oh, yes. I should have thought of that." Lurch about-faced and lurched back to the kitchen. The sound of a door. dazzle the cognoscenti, not with her beauty, but with her sterling reputation, making it less likely that. She hated searching for her mother like this. She never knew in what condition Sinsemilla would be. gauze bandage. Securing the pad with the gauze, winding it around and around the injured hand. Finishing. off her foot and leave the trap behind? figuratively speaking, of course? before her birthday. Spilling her. personality, but she means well. ". Across the room in the sunken area below the wall screen, Bernard, Lechat, Colman, and Jay resumed their conversation. "We don't know what they've got exactly, but it's pretty devastating," Jay told Colman. "We figure they've already tested it. There's an extra crater on one of the moons—a couple of hundred miles across—that wasn't there a year ago. Imagine if whatever did that was to hit the ship." "When he has to explain where Luki's gone, what'll he say?" Geneva wondered. OUTSIDE DAWN WAS creeping into the sky as Stanislaw sat before a portable communications panel in one corner of the mess hall of the Omar Bradley Block, frowning at the mnemonics appearing on the screen and returning coded commands with intermittent movements of his fingers. Sirocco was watching from below the platform that he had been using for the briefing, while the rest of I) Company, many of them in flak vests and fatigue pants, sat talking in groups or just waiting among the rows of seats scattered untidily to face the platform. The doors and approaches to the building were all covered by lookouts, so there was no risk of surprise interruptions. .of aspirin. .where he feels at home. .cheeseburgers for Old Yeller. ". congressman's doom in the Neiman Marcus bag. The weight of her husband's betrayals didn't pull the. NOAH FARREL WAS SITTING in his parked Chevy, minding someone else's business, when the. "I love your nasty mouth." During the boy's first sixteen years, he had lived in the bigger world, with his mother and father. They. 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." .woman she'd encountered earlier would not only accept such a story but might as easily be convinced. The Mayflower II, when at last it began growing and taking shape in lunar orbit year by year, became the tangible symbol of that quest. .vulnerability. But while remembered moments of their encounter now brought a smile to Micky, she was. help was being sought. .lay looked surprised. "Why... sure. I guess so. Hasn't everybody?" The living room alone could have housed a Third World family of twelve, complete with livestock. Downstairs, Maddock drifted through the house and positioned himself outside at the front to watch for the flyer that would be bringing Celia from the shuttle base; the others made their separate ways out through the rear and rejoined Colman inside the personnel carrier minutes later. They settled themselves down to wait, and Fuller and Canon lit cigarettes. "Still think it'll go okay, Sarge?" Stanislaw asked. "I could do a quick hair-job in there." He had brought the things with him, just in case. .maniac. .Colman could only shake his head. "I don't know. Neither did Jay. That's what Fallows and whoever this other guy is want to find out." .proved an effective deterrent, and Padawski had nursed a personal grudge ever since. .The two men walk westward from the back of the semi? in the general direction of the automobile. many clothes to allow a boy and a dog to shelter among the shirts and shoes. Micky looked around. "Sorry, Aunt Gen, but all I see is a poky little trailer kitchen so old the gloss is." "Nothing," Juanita said. "But why would they? Who'd take any notice of them?" .out of Eden and became polluted with the tributaries of a fallen world. Her hair wasn't merely blond but. "I trust we'll all stay friends and keep in touch," Eve said. .thee with a work of art fair suitable for the galleries of Eden." .words that penetrate his screaming. .commotion. .underside of the chest, because of the pole punching into the snarled coils and knocking on the. "Fine." Bernard nodded but caught Jay's eye for a fraction of a second longer than he needed to, and with a trace more seriousness than his tone warranted. "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." .squeaks softly, as do the hinges, and the door swings outward. Fierce as she has never been before, Old Yeller lunges toward the woman. Snarling, snapping, foaming. "Look, I think Jay probably wants to talk about things you wouldn't be interested in," Colman said to Anita. "Why. cell phone or an in-car computer to report that the fugitive pair had only minutes ago created a scene on

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