

### Merry and Bright

Synopsis: Over Christmas dinner, Maggie and Harold share their love and memories, ensuring their holiday shines as brightly as it once did.

There was a distinct smell of onion and roasting turkey drifting through the kitchen door as Maggie hung a holly-lined wreath carefully on the dining room door. “Don’t be nodding off before dinner, Harold,” she called, “It’ll only be another five minutes!”

From the living room came the monotone voice of the newsreader, forced to deliver stories about local cats at 1pm on Christmas Day. Almost drowning this noise out completely was the unmistakable rasp of a snore, shaking the walls. Maggie rolled her eyes fondly. “Every year,” she muttered to herself, frantically mashing the potatoes as they splattered up the tiled walls. “I will be starting,” she shouted, “whether you’re at the table or not!”.

Harold was now at the table, a cloth tucked into his collar, ready to catch any strays. He wore a light-blue paper hat that sat at a slight tilt on his balding head, and he slumped forward slightly, looking down at the table of food before him.

The dining room was fully decorated for the Christmas season, with various snow globes along the fireplace, and sparkling lights shining on wreaths adorned with flowers and berries, meticulously placed on each door.

“Right, Harold,” Maggie announced brightly, setting one plate opposite her own onto the table. “Dinner’s ready.” She perched in her chair, smoothed her red, paper crown, and raised her glass. “Merry Christmas, my love.”

Harold didn’t answer, of course, he wasn’t able to any more. His sudden stroke early this year had taken much from them both. Where there was once an energetic, ridiculous man, there was now a shadow of what he was. A man faded, his eyes half-closed and his hands trembling over the plate. Conversation was a lost art in this home, but Maggie filled in the silence for him, as she always did.

“Don’t you look smart?” she teased, “That jumper’s lasted better than we thought it would. Never turn down a discount, Harold. Four Christmases on, and no holes. It’s ridiculous what some people give away, it really is.”

Her fork clinked against the plate as she carved into her slice of turkey. “You need to have your vegetables, Harold. You can’t be having just carbs this time. I’ve let you off the past few years, but you know what the hospital said.”

She reached across, straightening his paper hat and nudging his plate slightly closer. “There you go, love,” she said, in a soft tone, brushing a stray crumb from his napkin. “We’ve got the grandkids tomorrow, remember? So it’ll have to be an early night tonight.”

Harold’s hand twitched toward his plate, a faint spark of her husband still lingering. Maggie caught it, leant forward and placed her hand on his, stroking it. “I love you, you daft old fool,” she whispered. “Always will”.

Harold's eyes slowly lifted to meet hers, and for a flicker of a moment, she could see the old him again, bright and full of hope and love, smiling under the twinkling lights.