The Curious Fruitcake Incident

by Grey_wonderer

Summary

There is nothing quite like a holiday fruitcake and certainly nothing to compare to one of the Widow Rumble's fruitcakes. Frodo knows all about the Widow's traditional Yule fruitcake, but Sam finds out the hard way.

*This story was written for and inspired by a holiday challenge set forth on 'tol_eressea', a Frodo and Sam, Elijah and Sean community on Dreamwidth: "Yuletide Stocking Stuffer Celebration 2012" The prompt was the word fruitcake. My thanks to the group and to Ibilover who gave me permission to post this here.

Notes

This story takes place pre-Quest.

Unfortunately, this story was not lucky enough to be Beta'd prior to posting, so all of the mistakes in it belong to the me. The characters are the wonderful creations of J. R. R. Tolkien. No profit is being made from this tale. If you read, then I thank you very much for stopping by. GW

************************************“The Curious Fruitcake Incident”************************************

“Sam! Sam, are you all right? Can you hear me? Sam?” Frodo knelt beside his dear friend and
took his hand in his. He began patting Sam gently on the cheek. “Sam?”

“Shall I get some cold water in a bucket?” Merry asked, leaning over and peering down at the prone gardener with a mixture of worry and confusion.

“Is he dead?” Pippin whispered softly.

“He’s not dead,” Frodo answered sharply. “Get a pan of cool water and a flannel, Merry and be quick.”

“Not a bucket?” Merry frowned.

“A small pan will do. Now, hurry,” Frodo said, still holding Sam’s hand.

Pippin leaned over and whispered again, “Are you certain he’s not dead?”

Frodo ignored the twelve-year-old and pushed Sam’s curls back from his forehead. “Oh, Sam,” he sighed.

Merry returned to find Frodo examining a large lump on Sam’s head. “Look out, Cousin,” Merry called and proceeded to toss the entire pan of water into Sam’s motionless face.

Frodo glared at Merry, water dripping off the tip of his nose, his best waistcoat soaked. He was about to say something rather nasty to his well-meaning cousin when he heard Sam coughing. He reached over and placed a hand behind Sam’s head, gently raising him enough so that the water he’d been drenched with wouldn’t choke him. “Sam? Are you all right? Can you hear me?”

“So, he’s not dead?” Pippin said.

“The water’s brought him to,” Merry grinned. “I think a bucket would have worked better. More cold water, quicker results and all, but I guess Frodo was right. The pan was enough to do the job.”

Frodo ignored both of them and helped Sam sit up. “Are you all right, Sam?” he asked.

Sam attempted to focus on Mr. Frodo who seemed to be spinning in a circle for some reason. He watched as Mr. Frodo slowly came to a stop and his worried face swam into focus. “What happened?” he asked.

“You were hit on the head,” Frodo said. “You were knocked unconscious for a time, but now you seem to be doing much better. Don’t try to stand just yet. When you’ve had a minute to settle, I’ll help you to the sofa.”

“Did it rain?” Sam asked. “I think my hair is wet and there’s a good size puddle here in the floor. Then again, it wouldn’t be rainin’ inside, would it?” He looked confused but he sounded lucid.

“No, it didn’t rain,” Frodo said giving Merry an irritated glance.

“You told me to get a pan of water,” Merry objected. “I just did what you asked me to do.”

“And a flannel, which I planned to dip into the water and use to gently bring Sam around,” Frodo sighed.

“I thought the flannel was for cleaning up afterward,” Merry shrugged. “But, it worked very well my way and as Sam’s Gaffer might say, ‘You can’t argue with results.’”

Frodo appeared as if he wanted very much to argue about the results, but he was too worried
Frodo appeared as if he wanted very much to argue about the results, but he was too worried about Sam and turned his attention back to his rather damp friend.

“Was I moppin’ the parlour?” Sam asked still trying to put it all together.

“No, you weren’t,” Frodo said. “Do you think you can stand if I help you?”

“I think so,” Sam said, though he wasn’t exactly certain.

“Meriadoc, get some more dry flannels and one of my dressing gowns,” Frodo said. “And when you return with them, just hold them until I ask for them. Do not throw them at anyone.”

Merry left the room muttering to himself as Frodo helped Sam to his feet. “I want you to lean on me, Sam,” Frodo instructed. “I’m going to help you to the sofa now. We’ll do this nice and slow.” Frodo had one arm firmly about Sam’s waist and was holding onto his elbow with the other. Cautiously, he began to help Sam move toward the sofa. “That’s it. Nice and easy,” he said encouragingly. “Are you feeling all right, Sam?”

“My head aches a might, but not so much that I can’t manage, Mr. Frodo,” Sam said.

“You have a small lump on your forehead where you were hit. When we get you settled on the sofa, I’ll fix a cold compress and the swelling should go down in no time,” Frodo explained.

“A small lump?” Pippin frowned. “It’s the size of a goose egg, Sam. If Frodo had a goose, it might climb up on your head and try to hatch you.”


“But-”

“I said, hush,” Frodo repeated. “Sam has a head ache and-”

“I shouldn’t wonder, with a knot like that, anyone would have-”

“One more word out of you and I’ll put you on the road to the Tooklands on foot. If you walk at a brisk pace, you should read the Great Smials in a week or two,” Frodo said as he helped Sam to sit down.

It was obvious that Pippin didn’t fancy a long hike to Tuckborough because he instantly became silent allowing Frodo to focus all of his attention on Sam.

Merry had returned and was standing near the sofa with the requested items. Frodo reached up and took a large, blue, flannel and began to dry Sam’s hair and face very carefully so as not to make the injury worse. In spite of the fact that it really hadn’t been the most encouraging thing to say, Pippin was right. The lump on Sam’s forehead really was the size of a goose egg.

“No need to fuss, Mr. Frodo,” Sam said. “I can do that.” He reached for the flannel, but Frodo gently brushed his hand away.

“You just sit still and let me take care of you, Sam. That was a very nasty hit on the head you took. I think it’s best if you don’t move about too much,” Frodo said.

“Well, I’ll have to move in a bit, or we’ll not have any dinner. It’s bound to be getting’ late and I seem to recall that I was getting ready to put the taters on for the stew,” Sam said. “I had just got the last of them peeled and was puttin’ them in the pot, when I heard a commotion in the parlour and I seem to recall thinking’ that someone might have taken a fall or something. I left the taters and came in to see what was wrong.” He paused here for a minute as if searching his mind for the
rest of the events. “I can remember coming into the parlour and I looked ‘round the room and I saw,” he paused again. “I don’t recollect what it was that I saw.”

“It might not come back to you,” Pippin said, regaining the power of speech, having obviously forgot about Frodo’s earlier threat. “I wouldn’t worry about it. It probably wasn’t important.”

Frodo frowned. “He doesn’t need to remember it. I think I know exactly what happened. Hand me the dressing gown, Meriadoc.”

Merry silently handed the requested item to Frodo.

“Now, take your damp shirt off, Sam, and you can wear this until I can get you a dry shirt ready,” Frodo said.

“Oh, no, Mr. Frodo,” Sam objected. “I couldn’t wear your good dressing gown. My shirt’s not that wet. I’ll be right as rain directly.”

“I won’t take no for an answer, Sam,” Frodo said. “I’ll not have you catching your death. Beside, I do believe that this is an older one of Bilbo. You can't possibly harm it.”

“Merry, take Pippin into the kitchen and the two of you finish preparing the stew while Sam rests,” Frodo said. “Oh, and one of you bring Sam a nice cup of tea as soon as possible.”

“Come on, Merry,” Pippin said quickly taking his older cousin my the arm and practically dragging him out of the parlour.

“They two will ruin that stew, Mr. Frodo,” Sam said quietly once they had gone. “They mean well and all but Mr. Merry puts too many spices into things. Might be as they like it that way across the water, but it spoils the flavour, if you take my meaning.”

“I’m not worried about the stew, Samwise,” Frodo said, watching as Sam removed his damp shirt and handed it to him. “I just wanted them out of the parlour for a minute or two.” He handed Sam the well-worn, patchwork, dressing gown that had once belonged to Bilbo and helped him slip it on. “You need less confusion and some time to recover without having to deal with my younger cousins.”

“They’ve just got all excited over Yule, Mr. Frodo,” Sam said as Frodo tied the sash of the dressing gown around Sam’s waist. “Little ones, Master Pippin’s age, always get excited when it’s time for Yule.”

“Perhaps, but it doesn’t excuse this,” Frodo said, touching a finger to Sam’s injured forehead.

“How did that part ‘o things happen?” Sam asked. “All I recall is standin’ in the room lookin’ around for whatever was causin’ the racket. Next thing I know, I’m all wet and dizzy.”

“Are you still dizzy?” Frodo asked, the concern evident in his tone.

“No, I think if I sit here like you said for a bit, then I’ll be fine. I still have the pies to get ready after I’ve done the stew,” Sam said.

“You aren’t to worry about the cooking,” Frodo said.

“But we’ll be needin’ plenty ‘o afters once the rest of your Yule guests arrive. The pies were to be the afters for luncheon tomorrow,” Sam said. He stopped talking, his eyes suddenly catching sight of something lying in the floor. “Is that the fruitcake what Mr. Merry brought back from the Widow Rumble’s smial?”
Frodo nodded. “Yes.”

“Why is it in the parlour floor?” Sam asked. “We could have used it for tea tomorrow.”

Frodo winced. “No, we couldn’t serve *that* for tea.”

“Not now, what with its bein’ in the floor and all, but before whatever happened to it, happened, it would have been perfect for our tea,” Sam said. “Fruitcake is usually nice and fillin’ and it doesn’t take much of it so it tends to go further. It’s good for unexpected guests and large groups.”

Frodo walked over, picked the fruitcake up, and carried it over to the sofa. He placed it in Sam’s lap. “Tell me again, how this would be perfect for tea, Sam.”

Sam picked up the large, loaf-shaped cake and felt the weight of it. “It’s a might heavy but if you slice it thinly and have it with tea and maybe a bit of sweet cream or jam?”

“It doesn’t slice,” Frodo said. “We attempted that earlier.”

“You couldn’t slice it?”

“This fruitcake broke my best cake knife. The handle came right off. If we want to serve this to anyone, we’re going to need an axe just to cut them off a piece of it,” Frodo said.

Sam held the cake in both hands and inspected it. “It’s a might dry but if we soak it in some brandy, it might soften it up a bit.”

“Sam, every year, the Widow used to bring Bilbo one of these fruitcakes and every year I watched him experiment on them. He soaked them in brandy, he heated them over the fire, he placed one in a pan of boiling water, but we were never able to cut a single slice from any of them,” Frodo said. “The first Yule that I was here, I got excited when Widow Rumble brought the fruitcake. She had it in a nice serving dish with a tea towel over it and it smelled delicious. I have always loved fruitcake, but not the Widow’s fruitcake.”

“Mr. Bilbo put one of these in boiling water?” Sam looked astonished.

“For two hours,” Frodo said. “We timed it. When he took the tongs and removed it from the water, it was still as hard as stone. He broke the plate because it slipped from the tongs and dropped onto it. Cracked it right down the middle.”

“Don’t that beat all,” Sam said continuing to study the cake.

“Merry took last year’s home with him and he claims that he is using it as a door stop,” Frodo said. “He says it works very well for that.”

“Does the Widow know?” Sam asked, amazement giving way to concern. “She’s a fine person and it would break her heart if she knew that her fruitcake was being used to hold open a door off in Buckland.”

“She doesn’t know, Sam,” Frodo smiled. His dear friend’s generous spirit never failed to warm his heart. “Bilbo always told her how delicious the cakes were. When I asked him why he lied to her, he said that it might not actually *be* a lie. After all, since none of us has ever managed to cut a slice, or eat it, we don’t really know what they might taste like.”

“So, every year, she makes one ‘o these fruitcakes and gives it to you?” Sam said. “I don’t know how I missed that.”
“Bilbo was always quick to hide them as soon as the Widow left,” Frodo said. “He told me that the less folks that knew about them, the better chance he had of convincing the Widow that he’d enjoyed the cake. Like you, he didn’t want to upset her and he felt the fewer folks that knew about this, the better.”

“That seems wise,” Sam agreed. “I guess your cousins found out by accident.”

“I must confess that I told Merry,” Frodo said. “But, yes, Pippin found out by accident. Generally, most of the things Pippin learns involve some kind of accident.”

Sam grinned. Frodo was folding Sam’s damp shirt as he continued. Sam wanted to point out that it would dry quicker if it were placed flat somewhere, but Mr. Frodo was being so very kind just now, that Sam didn’t think it a good idea to say anything.

“Every, single, year, Widow Rumble would come by with a fruitcake, her special recipe, for Bilbo,” Frodo smiled. “She says that Bilbo and I are the only ones that appreciate her fruitcakes and since we enjoy them, she can’t imagine letting us do without during the Yule season. After Bilbo left, I thought perhaps she might quit making them for me, but she hasn’t. This year’s offering showed up just like they always do, three days before Yule and as hard as stone. There was a little note with it telling me how much it pleased her to share her grandmother’s recipe with someone that enjoyed it.”

Sam sighed. “So, will Mr. Merry be takin’ this back to Buckland with him after Yule to keep another door open?”

“This one is mine,” Pippin objected coming into the parlour carefully holding a cup of tea. “Merry said I could have this one since he already has two of them.” He handed the cup of tea to Sam. “I’m going to use this one in the wall we’re building to keep the cows out of the garden.”

“You’re going to put it in a wall?” Sam looked surprised. In spite of the fact that the cake seemed to weigh as much as a stone one might use in a wall, it was hard to imagine the fruitcake holding up stacked amid proper stones and out in all sorts of weather.

Pippin nodded. “I think I can sneak it into the pile of stones and it will just become part of the wall.”

“Aren’t you worried that them cows might try to eat it?”

“No, cows can’t chew this,” Pippin said rapping his knuckles on the fruitcake after handing Sam the tea cup. “It’s as hard as a stone.” Suddenly the lad looked guilty. “Sam, I’m sorry I hit you in the head with the Widow Rumble’s fruitcake. I didn’t mean to, honestly I didn’t.”

Sam rubbed gingerly at the knot on his forehead. “You mean to say this fruitcake is what done this to my head?”

Pippin nodded. “I was trying to break it open.”

“My head?” Sam looked startled.

“No, the fruitcake,” Pippin said quickly. “I thought if I threw it against the wall, it would crack in two pieces and since Merry said that no one has ever seen the inside of one of these, I wanted to be the first one to do it. I was aiming at the stone fireplace but then you walked in and my aim was off by a bit and, well, I’m sorry I hit you, Sam.”

“Don’t reckon there’s any real damage done,” Sam said.
“Merry says one of these fruitcakes thrown by someone strong enough, could kill a hobbit dead in his tracks,” Pippin said.

Sam looked at the fruitcake and frowned. “I suppose it could at that,” he murmured. He didn’t like to think on it, but apparently, he’d come very close to death and it was all because dear Mr. Bilbo had been good enough not to offend the Widow.

“Sam, you look slightly pale,” Frodo said. “Perhaps I should send for a healer. Pippin, go back into the kitchen and bring a cold cloth for Sam’s head. You just rest, Sam and when Pippin gets back with the cloth, I’ll send Merry for a healer.”

“No, I’m find, Mr. Frodo. I’ll just rest here for a bit and I’ll be good as new, only…”

“What is it, Sam,” Frodo asked.

“Could you find somewhere safe to put this fruitcake? Now that I know what it can do, it makes me nervous to hold it, if you understand me,” Sam said, handing the cake to Frodo.

“Completely,” Frodo said. “I’ll just put it in the kitchen.”

“But not on a high shelf or nothing,” Sam said. “It might fall off and hurt someone else.”

“No, I’ll hide it in the floor behind the apple barrels in the pantry. We can’t risk it falling on anyone.”

Pippin had returned with the compress for Sam’s head and Frodo took it from the lad and then he handed the fruitcake to Pippin. “Mind what I say and put that behind the apple barrels in the pantry. Do not throw it, try to eat it, or put it on a shelf, understand?”

Pippin nodded.

“And mind that you don’t drop it on your toes,” Frodo warned. “And have Merry go get the healer.”

“I don’t think even a healer can do anything about this fruitcake, Frodo,” Pippin frowned.

“The healer is for Sam, Peregrin, not the fruitcake,” Frodo sighed.

“Oh,” Pippin nodded and left the room, fruitcake in hand.

“Now, do not argue with me about the healer, Sam,” Frodo said sternly. “I don’t think it’s wise to leave this unattended.”

“No, I guess not,” Sam said. The more he learned about the Widow’s fruitcake, the more inclined he was to want a healer. He didn’t usually like to be fussed over that way, but all things considered, he was rather relieved that Mr. Frodo was insisting on it.

Merry stuck his head into the parlour and asked, “What do I tell the healer happened to Sam? Do I say that Pippin threw a fruitcake at him?”

“No,” Frodo and Sam both said at once.

“Tell him that Sam hit his head on the hearth while mopping the parlour,” Frodo said. “The stones in the hearth are probably as hard as the fruitcake, so that should do fine. And tell Pippin he is not to say one, single word about this to anyone. In fact, it might be best if Pippin were in his room when the healer gets here. I do not want any of this to be the cause of embarrassment for the
Widow. She's been a very good friend to us for many years.”

“Don’t worry about Pip,” Merry grinned. “I told him if he didn’t stay quiet about all of this, he couldn’t have the fruitcake.” With that, Merry left them to go and get the healer.

Sam watched the lad walk out of the room and then very quietly he said, “Mr. Frodo, you’ll pardon me for sayin’ so, but I don’t think Master Pippin’s old enough to have one the Widow’s fruitcakes. My Gaffer always says that you shouldn’t give dangerous objects to children. Besides, I’m a bit worried about them cows.”

GW
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