

THE FRUITCAKE

One-Act Comedy

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THE FRUITCAKE

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AT RISE: *The living room of a house, sometime before Christmas. An extended family has gathered at the home of AUNT HAZEL for her traditional party, the highlight of which — or the lowlight, depending on your point of view — is the serving of her infamous fruitcake. Everyone in this family is rather strange. GRANDPA sits in a chair, talking to himself. ZACH, the science nerd, sits in a chair using a laptop computer. ANASTASIA, a punk-goth teen dressed completely in black is either slumped in a chair, or standing around, arms crossed in defiance.*

ANASTASIA: I'm bored.

ZACH: **(reacting to something on the computer screen)** Wow! Look at the size of those! Whoa, that is amazing!

GRANDPA: What in blue blazes is going on up there? It sounds like a whole herd of squirrels running through the attic!

(MOM enters, trailing Christmas decorations. SHE's frantic, making a general commotion as SHE passes through looking everywhere SHE can think of.)

MOM: Has anybody seen the red light that goes on Rudolph's nose? I've found all the singing elves and the inflatable waving Santa and the dancing snowmen but I can't find the red light that goes on Rudolph's nose. I sure hope we don't have to use that blue one again. Last year, that's all your Uncle Fred could talk about — Rudolph the blue-nosed reindeer.

ZACH: **(laciviously)** Oh man, wait'll the guys see this site. This really is out of this world. **(If played as Zoe: Oh man, wait'll the girls see this site. This really is out of this world.)**

MOM: Now where did I put those red lights?

(MOM exits different from where SHE entered.)

ANASTASIA: There's nothing to do.

GRANDPA: Margaret, **(If played as GRANDMA, replace all "Margaret's" with "Marvin.")** now don't get all agitated, but I think that paperboy just put one on the roof again.

UNCLE FRED: **(enters, making a big show of his arrival, drinking eggnog)** Well, well, well, what do we have here? How are you kiddies doing?

ZACH: **(referring to what's on the computer screen)** Awesome! Just awesome!

UNCLE FRED: **(thinking ZACH is talking to him)** Well, I wouldn't go that far. Then again, a little more of this eggnog and I might be feeling like a kid again myself.

GRANDPA: Margaret, don't get on that step ladder! One of the rungs is coming loose! Margaret, do you hear me? Get down from there this instant! Margaret!

UNCLE FRED: **(taking notice)** Grandpa.

GRANDPA: Fred. **(returns to his imaginary conversation)** Now, look what you've gone and done. I'm gonna have to call the rescue squad! You just stay right there, you hear me? Don't move!

UNCLE FRED: **(to ANASTASIA)** And how are you doing little lady?

ANASTASIA: I'm not a little lady!

UNCLE FRED: Oh, you'll always be my little lady. Come and give your Uncle Fred a great big hug.

ANASTASIA: **(groans)** Give me one good reason.

UNCLE FRED: Oh, come on, it's Christmas! Wouldn't be Christmas without a big glass of eggnog, a slice of your Great-Aunt Hazel's famous fruitcake and a great big hug from my favorite niece.

ANASTASIA: I hate eggnog. What's in that stuff anyway? It's vile.

ZACH: Six eggs, half a teaspoon vanilla extract, one-fourth teaspoon ground nutmeg — **(may only get to this point in the recipe before ANASTASIA interrupts; director's choice)** two cups whipping cream, two cups milk, one cup plus one tablespoon of sugar, three-fourths cup brandy, one-third cup dark rum —

ANASTASIA: Yuck. It's really got eggs in there?

ZACH: Eggs are like dark matter and dark energy in the cosmos — it's the stuff that holds things together.

ANASTASIA: I think I'm going to become a vegetarian.

UNCLE FRED: Ah, what a kidder you are. But that won't get you out of having to try Aunt Hazel's fruitcake. You know, we think there might actually be some real fruit in there.

ANASTASIA: Another reason why I hate Christmas.

UNCLE FRED: Oh, come here and tell me what you've been up to this year. **(hugs her, but jumps back with pain)** Ow!

ANASTASIA: **(happily, for a change)** Did I tell you I got seven new piercings this year?

UNCLE FRED: **(still feeling pain)** It's like hugging a human pin cushion.

ANASTASIA: **(grinning evilly)** I know.

ZACH: Wow. Look at the size of that one. Va-va-va-voom!

UNCLE FRED: Whatcha doing over there sport?

ZACH: Looking at models.

UNCLE FRED: Models, eh? What, um, kind of models?

ZACH: Models with superstrings.

UNCLE FRED: Strings? You mean, like those new string bikinis? Lemme see. You know, I used to be quite a ladies' man myself back in the day. **(looks at the screen and is instantly confused)** What in the world?

GRANDPA: Yes, Margaret, I know that rose bush has thorns but the lady at the rescue squad said you shouldn't move until they can get here! So you just stay right there!

ZACH: It's a model.

UNCLE FRED: **(confused)** That's not one of those pictures by, what do you call him, Salvador Dali?

ZACH: You're looking at it upside down.

UNCLE FRED: Oh. But where are the — you know — the — uh —

ZACH: It's a computer model of the beginning of the universe. See this shows the big bang —

UNCLE FRED: **(still confused)** Well, I knew something there was big.

ZACH: And this shows neutrinos and quarks and bosons—

UNCLE FRED: Bozos? I thought Bozo was a clown.

ZACH: Bosons. They're elementary particles that mediate the weak nuclear force. Technically, they're particles that have integer intrinsic angular momentum.

ANASTASIA: Geez, do we have to listen to a science lesson?

ZACH: These are the building blocks of the whole cosmos. Everything's either a boson or a fermion.

UNCLE FRED: Fermented? You know, I think Aunt Hazel's fruitcake is fermented.

ZACH: Fermions!

UNCLE FRED: Or maybe it's this eggnog.

ZACH: Now fermions have odd half-integer intrinsic angular momentum — so they're measured as either one-half or three over two or —

ANASTASIA: **(mutters)** You should talk about odd . . .

(AMY enters, with her boyfriend JEREMY in tow.)

AMY: So, how are we all doing in here, everybody?

ZACH: We're learning about the unified field theory of quantum physics.

ANASTASIA: **(coolly)** Zack's **(or Zoe's)** learning. Some of us are wishing we had an atom-smasher handy.

UNCLE FRED: Amy! How's my favorite niece? Come over here and give me a great big hug —umm, wait, you don't have any piercings do you?

(AMY stops UNCLE FRED from hugging her by pushing JEREMY forward.)

AMY: Uncle Fred, I'd like you to meet Jeremy. Jeremy, this is Uncle Fred.

JEREMY: **(timidly)** Pleased to meet you.

UNCLE FRED: Oh, so you're Amy's latest boyfriend, huh? So what number are you now?

AMY: Uncle Fred!

UNCLE FRED: Well, I know you're out of single digits for sure now. **(to JEREMY)** That Amy, she runs through boyfriends faster than long-tailed cat runs through a room full of rocking chairs.

AMY: Uncle Fred!!

UNCLE FRED: Who was the fellow you had here last Christmas? Darrell? Derrick? Devon? One of those D names.

(AMY ignores him.)

ANASTASIA: **(mutters)** Yeah, D for dweeb.

AMY: And this is my little sister, Annie. You've heard me talk about Annie.

ANASTASIA: It's Anastasia.

AMY: Whatever. I call her Annie. Isn't she cute?

ANASTASIA: It's Anastasia! And I'm not cute!

AMY: And this is her cousin Zach, who's in from **(pick a state or city that would be appropriate to the audience)** for the holidays. Say hi, Zach.

ZACH: **(entranced by computer)** Greetings, fellow earthling.

JEREMY: **(timidly)** Hello.

AMY: His parents went to Disney World for the holidays, but he decided to stay here and research his science homework.

(pause) For extra credit! **(whispers)** He's a little — **(indicates with her fingers that HE's crazy)** — if you ask me.

GRANDPA: What in tarnation? Good heavens, look at the size of that thing! Margaret, you better stop what you're doing

and have a look at this!

AMY: And that's Grandpa over there.

JEREMY: I see.

GRANDPA: Now, Margaret, before you go prune the rest of that hedge, there's something you should know. Margaret! Are you listening to me? Margaret!

AUNT HAZEL: **(enters, from the kitchen wearing an apron, and has obviously been cooking)** Amy? Oh Amy? Oh, there you are, dear. Can you help me? I need you to help me get my special flour mix down from the top shelf. I've got to have my special flour mix, you know. Wouldn't be the same without it, you know!

ANASTASIA: **(dryly)** That's for sure.

GRANDPA: Well, if you'd listened to me, you'd have known there was a hornet's nest in there. Now quit your screeching. We can put some mercurochrome on it.

AUNT HAZEL: **(looking around, with her poor eyesight)** Amy, where's that new boyfriend of yours?

JEREMY: I'm right here, ma'am

AUNT HAZEL: I can hear you, but I can't see you very well. **(reaches out to feel him)** Oh my, you're **(taller)** than the one she had last year.

AMY: Uh, that's the hat rack, Aunt Hazel.

AUNT HAZEL: I thought he was awfully skinny. Usually, you like them a little fatter, don't you, Amy? That one last year, he was more of a butterball, wasn't he?

UNCLE FRED: That was the turkey.

ANASTASIA: The one last year was a turkey!

GRANDPA: Just like painting a barn door. Just slather that stuff on there. It'll stop hurting directly.

ZACH: Did you know that modern turkeys are produced entirely through artificial insemination? Years of breeding has produced a bird that's too big to mate naturally? It's really quite a genetic marvel—

AMY: Zach, that's enough!

AUNT HAZEL: **(finding Jeremy)** There you are dear. I just want you to know you're in for a real treat, young man. Yes you are.

JEREMY: Yes, ma'am.

GRANDPA: I swear, you need your eyes examined, Margaret. You're getting as bad as your sister, Hazel.

AUNT HAZEL: You see, I've got a special flour mix that's been handed down through the generations that I always make my fruitcake out of.

JEREMY: Don't you mean a special recipe?

AUNT HAZEL: Oh no, I mean a special flour. My sister Margaret, **(“My brother, Marvin” if GRANDMA is played by a female.)** poor thing, gave it to me years ago. I'm not sure where she got it. She never told me before she passed on. I put in a pinch every year, just for old time's sake. It's tradition, you know.

JEREMY: I see.

ANASTASIA: **(muttering)** Someday, they'll probably find out it's some kind of poison and she's been trying to kill us all these years.

ZACH: It's been theorized that Napoleon was poisoned on St. Helena by his British jailors. DNA tests show high levels of arsenic in his hair.

ANASTASIA: That's enough!

AUNT HAZEL: **(turning to AMY)** Come on, Amy, time's a-wasting. Oh, does anybody have a handkerchief?

JEREMY: Uh, I do. **(produces a handkerchief)** Are you feeling all right, ma'am? Do you have to sneeze?

(AUNT HAZEL starts to blindfold the hat rack or some other piece of furniture)

AUNT HAZEL: Oh no, I just can't let anybody see where I keep my special flour.

AMY: Uh, I'm over here.

AUNT HAZEL: Oh yes, yes you are. **(begins to blindfold AMY)**

JEREMY: But didn't you just say you kept the flour on the top shelf?

AUNT HAZEL: Silly boy. I didn't say which shelf. I like this one, Amy, he's a lot funnier than the one you had last year. Or was it the year before that? I forget. They all run together.

AMY: **(to JEREMY)** Well, I've got to go help Aunt Hazel in the kitchen. Why don't you just make yourself comfortable in here? You can get to know people. I promise I won't be long snuggle-bums.

(AMY kisses JEREMY on the cheek and exits. SHE might have to make a point of peeking out from under the blindfold to do this.)

ANASTASIA: Snuggle-bums? Yuck.

UNCLE FRED: Hmm. She called the last one snuggle bunny. I wonder where this puts him? Is snuggle-bums better or worse than snuggle bunny?

(A scream and a crash are heard from off-stage.)

AUNT HAZEL: **(from off-stage)** Oh, I'm sorry, dear. I forgot to tell you that rung of the ladder's been broken. Has been for years. Here, you hold the ladder and I'll climb up there. You just stay blindfolded now, you hear?

ANASTASIA: Talk about the blind leading the blind.

UNCLE FRED: So, you've been exiled from the kitchen, too, eh?

JEREMY: I, uh, suppose so.

UNCLE FRED: Probably just as well. When those hens get in there cooking, best to steer clear of the whole disaster, if you ask me. I like to think of this room as sort of a safe haven.

ANASTASIA: I prefer to think of this as the holding cell where condemned prisoners wait for their execution.

GRANDPA: Margaret, what in the name of thunder are you doing? That's not the can of fertilizer for the begonias! Margaret, are you listening to me?!

(A loud noise of something falling comes from offstage.)

ANASTASIA: Except even a condemned man gets a last meal. All we get is great Aunt Hazel's fruitcake.

GRANDPA: I tried to tell you that was the gasoline for the lawn mower. Now look what you've gone and done! Margaret! Are you listening to me? And for goodness sake, now's no time for a Lucky Strike.

(JEREMY stares at GRANDPA.)

UNCLE FRED: Oh, don't mind him. That's just GRANDPA catching up.

GRANDPA: I'll call the fire department.

JEREMY: Catching up?

UNCLE FRED: You see, Grandma, bless her soul, was such a motor mouth that poor Grandpa there never could get a word in edgewise. Now that she's passed on, he's finally able to say all the things he was trying to say all those years.

JEREMY: So you mean he just sits there all day blurting things out?

UNCLE FRED: I think he's up to, oh, about 1968 right now.

GRANDPA: No, Margaret, you're wrong, that Nixon fellow looks very honest to me. Just look at his eyes. You can always tell whether a fellow's honest by looking in his eyes.

ANASTASIA: Sounds like Grandpa should have limited his advice to household chores.

UNCLE FRED: Bad eyesight runs on that side of the family, you know.

ZACH: Simple genetics. See, you've got two types of genes — dominant and recessive.

ANASTASIA: Is that anything like dominance and submission?

ZACH: Gregor Mendel first explained all this in 1866 with his experiments on pea plants.

ANASTASIA: Peas? I hate peas.

UNCLE FRED: So, Josh, can I get you some eggnog?

JEREMY: Uh, it's Jeremy.

UNCLE FRED: Right. Well, let me let you in on a little secret, Gerald — Aunt Hazel's fruitcake goes down a lot easier with some eggnog.

ANASTASIA: Yeah, if you like drinking dead chickens.

JEREMY: Um, that's OK.

UNCLE FRED: Or sometimes, a lot of eggnog.

ANASTASIA: Yeah, sometimes it doesn't go down at all.

UNCLE FRED: Well, I think I need a little refresher . . . **(pours himself some eggnog, and spikes it)** A little eggnog, a little Christmas cheer, a little eggnog, a little more Christmas cheer.

JEREMY: So, uh, your name's Annie?

ANASTASIA: Anastasia!

JEREMY: Right, Anastasia, I see. Well, that's a pretty name.

ANASTASIA: I was named after a song.

JEREMY: Oh, really, which song is that?

ANASTASIA: "Sympathy for the Devil."

JEREMY: Oh.

ANASTASIA: You know the line, "Anastasia screamed in vain."

JEREMY: Uh, not really.

ANASTASIA: The Romanovs? The Russian royal family? Gunned down by the Bolsheviks after the revolution? Oh, you're as hopeless as that D-whatever-his-name-was guy last year. It's enough to make me scream, too.

UNCLE FRED: **(returns to the conversation; growing more inebriated)** Speaking of screaming, remember last year when Grandpa bit into the fruitcake and then couldn't let go — it pulled his dentures right out of his mouth?! Now that was funny! **(to ZACH)** What was that stuff we had to use to get 'em loose with?

ZACH: H2, SO4.

ANASTASIA: Battery acid!

UNCLE FRED: Our resident science nerd there knows all that kind of technical mumbo-jumbo. Me, I'd have just let the old coot suck on his gums for awhile.

JEREMY: I see. So this fruitcake thing —is this, like, some kind of family tradition?

UNCLE FRED: Worse! It happens every year. **(The lights blink.)** What the —

ANASTASIA: Heads up, everybody. Here she comes.

JEREMY: Who are you talking about?

ANASTASIA: Miss Christmas Cheer herself.

MOM: **(enters, trailing more Christmas decorations)** Well, I found the red bulb, but now I think I've gone and blown a fuse and it's gone out again. Your father thinks it's the singing elves that are doing it but I think it's the dancing snowmen. Those dancing snowmen always cause trouble. Does anybody know where the extension cord is? If I had an extension cord, I could run another line out of the bathroom window . . . **(exits)**

ANASTASIA: Maybe if she blows the fuse again we won't have to eat Aunt Hazel's fruitcake.

UNCLE FRED: Too late. They're already working on next year's. **(ANASTASIA groans.)** That's the tradition, you know. They always cook next year's before we can eat last year's.

ANASTASIA: You mean we have to eat something that's a year old? No wonder it tastes like something that's had rigor mortis set in.

ZACH: Actually, it's the natural aging process, very similar to wine.

ANASTASIA: Oh great, here comes another science lesson.

ZACH: You see, it's the sugars that bring out the taste. Fruitcake has a high sugar content, and sugars are very acidic, which makes them quite effective preservatives —

MOM: **(enters)** Well, I guess this blue light will have to do until we can go to the store and get another red one.

UNCLE FRED: Oh, I see you've going to have another prude-olph this year. Get it? Prude-olph? Prude-olph!

MOM: **(looks in the closet)** I get it. Very funny. Now, Fred, could you help me look for the extension cord?

UNCLE FRED: Oh, you know I'd love to, sis, but my back's acting up again. My doctor says I shouldn't do any heavy lifting.

ANASTASIA: It's an extension cord!

MOM: Now, if I can just get those dancing snowmen to work right. They're supposed to shimmy and shake but it looks like more of a bump and grind to me — **(acts it out)**

ANASTASIA: **(horrified)** Mom!

MOM: Last year, it was more of a cha-cha kid of thing they were doing. **(acts it out)**

ANASTASIA: **(horrified)** I don't want to see this!

MOM: Or was it a tango? **(acts it out)**

ANASTASIA: Oh good grief!

MOM: Whatever it was, I think it's because the singing elves are taking too much power. You know they're supposed to light up their eyes whenever they hit the high notes. That's why I think if I had an extension cord to pull the power out of a different outlet, we could get everything to light up at the same time for a change.

ZACH: By my calculations, the snowmen use more than 1,000 watts of electricity per snowman. Now, add in the singing elves and the heavenly host of angels on the roof — they must be pulling a lot of voltage to make their haloes light up like that —

UNCLE FRED: Don't forget the talking donkey in the nativity scene. You know, she had a talking donkey long before that Shrek movie ever did.

MOM: I bet that extension cord is out in the garage. I'm going to go look in the garage. **(exits)**

JEREMY: So, you've got a bad back?

UNCLE FRED: What? Me? Oh, no. I just don't want to get involved in helping her set up her Christmas decorations. She always goes overboard.

ZACH: **(reviewing his calculations)** That can't be right. I must have done something wrong.

UNCLE FRED: What's it all add up to there, Einstein?

ZACH: Chernobyl.

(ANDY enters, holding something that's covered up. HE is a tough outdoors type, perhaps wearing camo.)

ANDY: I've got it!

ANASTASIA: You've got what?

ANDY: The target. The quarry. The objective. **(uncovers what HE's holding)** The fruitcake!

ANASTASIA: You stole great-Aunt Hazel's fruitcake!

ANDY: I didn't steal it. I liberated it. I borrowed it.

UNCLE FRED: Does that mean you have to give it back?

ANDY: You remember last year, when we were trying to get Grandpa's dentures loose, and we were wondering what made the thing so tough? **(notices JEREMY and stops)** Who's the new guy?

JEREMY: Hi, I'm Jeremy.

ANDY: You must be Amy's new boyfriend.

JEREMY: Uh, yeah, I guess I am.

ANDY: I guess after the denture incident, the fellow she brought home last year must have gotten scared off. You know, I had no idea that battery acid would eat through a pair of dentures like that. Didn't seem to hurt the fruitcake, though.

UNCLE FRED: That was nothing. Remember that one time, she had a boyfriend who bit into a slice and dislocated his whole jaw? **(to JEREMY)** Oh, don't worry about that; insurance covered everything.

ANASTASIA: And remember the one the year before that who had trouble chewing the thing and got a piece lodged in his throat? Good thing Andy here knew the Heimlich maneuver.

UNCLE FRED: Although next time, you may not want to grab him quite as tight. I hear it took quite a while for that broken rib to heal.

ANDY: I'm Amy's brother. **(“I'm Amy's older sister” if played as MANDY.)** Pleased to meet you. **(shakes hands with JEREMY; If male:)** The name's Andy. Get it? Andy, Amy, Anastasia — A, A, A, just like batteries **(If played as a female:)** The name's Amanda, but everybody just called me Mandy. Too much alliteration in this family. Can't stand it.

UNCLE FRED: **(If ANDY is played as male:)** I knew there was something I had forgotten to get! They make great stocking stuffers, you know?

UNCLE FRED: **(If MANDY is played as female:)** That's not true. The only illiterate in this family is Aunt Hazel, and that's just because she refuses to wear glasses.

ANDY: So, anyway, this year we're going to conduct a little science experiment. Aren't we, Zach?

ZACH: **(has a clipboard on which to check things off)** Nothing like empirical evidence. I'm ready when you are.

JEREMY: So you're going to see what's the fruitcake is made of?

ANDY: No, we're going to see whether this thing really is indestructible. Anastasia, are we still on?

ANASTASIA: Ten dollars says you can't destroy it.

ANDY: Ten dollars says we can.

UNCLE FRED: Whoa, whoa, whoa, children, children, children. Let's come to our senses for a moment. You're talking about Aunt Hazel's fruitcake here. This is an honored family tradition.

ANDY: Uh huh.

ANASTASIA: So?

UNCLE FRED: So? Don't you think being together at the holidays means a lot more than some silly ten dollar wager that makes fun of one of our own family members?

ANDY: You're right. Fifty.

ANASTASIA: You're on.

UNCLE FRED: All right. Here are the rules. What do we mean by destruction?

ZACH: Complete and utter loss of structural integrity.

UNCLE FRED: Right. So nicks and scrapes don't count. Pieces torn off, knocked off, blown off don't count. It's got to at least break into two.

ZACH: Any restrictions on equipment?

UNCLE FRED: Only common household items.

ANDY: So the bazooka is out. Darn, and I got it down at the Army surplus store just for this.

ZACH: Ways and means?

UNCLE FRED: You're limited only by your imagination.

ANASTASIA: Oh, I can imagine lots of things.

ANDY: What about some C-4? I worked with all kinds of explosives when I was serving overseas. They didn't call me “boom-boom” for nothing.

UNCLE FRED: And the laws of the United States and the state of Virginia, **(Director: Feel free to substitute another location.)** plus any local zoning restrictions that might apply.

ANASTASIA: Well, there goes the plan Andy had for the neutron bomb.

END OF FREE PREVIEW