

Later We'll Have Some Pumpkin Pie

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Later We'll Have Some Pumpkin Pie

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Summary

Having to get a tree for the mess hall on some god-forsaken planet on Christmas Eve is not what Evan Lorne had pictured when he took the job of Sheppard's second-in-command.

Notes

So, so sorry for being a little late with the fic but inspiration struck really late in the season. I hope it's still okay. Special thanks to my beta **mackenziesmomma** who had heaps of other stuff to do but still made time to beta it in time for me to post it. It's also the first time I wrote something that could, if you squint, be considered OT3, so um be gentle, please?

Later We'll Have Some Pumpkin Pie

*"Rockin' around the Christmas tree at the Christmas party hop
Mistletoe hung where you can see and every couple tries to stop
Rockin' around the Christmas tree let the Christmas spirit ring
Later we'll have some pumpkin pie and we'll do some caroling."*

Lynn Anderson, "Rockin' Around The Christmas Tree"

The SGC messed up this year, they said. Go get yourself to M8O-735, they said. Get us a decent looking tree for the mess hall, they said. *No* one said anything about having to master any *challenges* to get the damn tree. He huffs. *Challenges*. More like "help us get everything off our to-do list we didn't have the time to the rest of the year or our gods will be very, very angry with us".

They've been on this planet for roughly three hours and so far, Cadman helped the locals clear a cavern that caved in at the beginning of the planetary year – at least she got to blow something up, he kind of sourly thought when he heard her yell "Fire in the hole!" a lot louder than necessary – before moving on to give impromptu lessons on how to handle unstable natural structures, Hospital Corpsman First Class Gryffis is still on the probably most extensive MEDCAP mission of her entire military career *and* is doing a very thorough job of supplying the village's kids with a year worth of candy, and it looks like Dr. Aubeyame got dragged off to reorganize the entire village's cattle breeding schedule.

Which leaves him as team commander with basically nothing to do, and a feeling of superfluity. Just. Great. Of course he *could* join Cadman and put the geology knowledge he acquired once upon a time at the US Air Force Academy to use but she'd probably just tell him to either brush up a good deal on it or stop messing with her job so yeah. Stuck sitting in the biting cold at the edge of the central square to wait his turn to check back in with Atlantis while everyone else is off being useful. That is *not* how he pictured his job when he came to the Pegasus Galaxy three years ago.

Left stewing like that, he can't help being pissed off at the SGC just a little bit for *forgetting to put a fucking Christmas tree* on the freight list for Caldwell's latest supply run. Or putting the tree on it and *still* forgetting to check if the tree made it into the *Daedalus's* freight compartments and not realizing that half an entire container ended up getting filled with mistletoe of all things. Whoever fucked up this supply drop hopefully ended up stuck at the SGC from Thanksgiving to New Year without a break.

So... "Are you really still moping because you didn't get to blow up the rubble in that cave?"

Right. What is it with Cadman trying to spread the rumor that he's about as boom crazy as she? Yeah, he does get a little jealous now and then when she gets to blow up something cool but he's nowhere near as trigger happy as she, seriously. He makes a face. "That's still "are you really still moping because you didn't get to blow up the rubble in that cave, *sir?*" to you, *Lieutenant.*"

She snorts “Since *when?*” Ah, fuck. Ever since they came to Atlantis on the same *Daedalus* run three years ago, Cadman somehow managed to get deep enough under his skin that he could never really bring himself to rein in her tendency for insolence, and that’s what he gets for it.

He can still try to improve on that, right? “Since I wear bronze leaves and you wear a silver bar for rank insignia.”

Another snort, sounding definitely amused. Goddammit. “Not wearing either right now, *sir*,” she reminds him and adds, “Come on, let’s go contact Atlantis. *Obviously*, you need something to do very badly.”

God, he hates how well she can see through him. And how easily she can order him around when he’s cranky, like now. Unfortunately, she’s even right. Their scheduled check in with Atlantis is in another ten minutes, and they need to be going now if they want to make it to the Gate in time. Suppressing a long-suffering sigh, he radios Gryffis and Aubeyame to tell them about the little hike he’s going on with Cadman and then sets off, not bothering to tell her to follow him.

He knows she’ll do so, anyway, because they’ve been working with each other for three years and for everything lacking in the seriousness department, Cadman’s still a decent soldier who knows when to just shut up and do as he expects of her. Also, it *was* her idea to get going, and if he weren’t in such a shitty mood, he’d absolutely agree with her that he desperately needed something to do, to get moving to get out of whatever funk he’s gotten himself into.

Also, it *was* really fucking cold, despite wearing standard cold weather gear.

“So,” he hears her deadpan next to him after a few minutes of walking along the path back to the Gate, “want to tell me what got you in such a snit or would you like to continue being the strong silent type?”

Ah, *fuck* it. He hates it when she goes and makes him smile despite himself, just when he expects it least. Then again, he probably should have seen that one coming from a mile away, so he just rolls his eyes at himself and grunts before replying, “Just not my day is all.”

“Ah, yeah, thought you’d feel a little useless after the villagers told us what they need to get done.” Jesus... how does she *do* that? In all of Atlantis, Laura Cadman seems to be the only one who has him figured out well enough to know more about him than he’d like.

“Yeah, or maybe it’s that.” No use in denying it because once Cadman has realized what’s going on with him, it’s usually impossible to keep on pretending. Now he does sigh. “Sorry for being an ass about it.”

Normally, majors do not apologize to lieutenants, for *anything*, he knows that. Has been teaching it to company grades for as long as he’s been wearing oak leaves, has even tried to teach Cadman, once upon a time. Now, she never *expects* him to apologize to her but around her, he just can’t help himself and slips into far too informal bearing than is strictly allowed and advised.

She shrugs. “It’s fine. ‘Sides, they messed up *my* Christmas packages, as well.” Yep, there she goes again. Because, if he’s honest... the thing bothering him is not that they forgot to take the tree onboard. It’s that they *also* forgot half the crew’s presents and Christmas packages, and he had the misfortune of *not* being part of the other half who did get them.

He sighs again, making a contrite face. “I know. I’ll get it sorted out soon as I can, alright?” Her face tells him that he should probably let *her* sort it out but he likes to have her on his team too much to let her ruin her career with sending dung bombs back to the SGC or something like that so he doesn’t give her a chance to speak up and instead says, “You wanna do the honors?” while pointing towards the DHD.

Cadman *very* clearly still wants to discuss how to sort out the SGC messing up getting everything their families and friends sent to Atlantis but just for once, she keeps quiet and dials Atlantis. The event horizon establishes and he crouches down in front of the stationary camera they installed when relations with the village turned into permanent, keying his radio at the same time. “Atlantis, this is Lorne, do you read me?”

The answer comes succinctly. “Loud and clear, Major.” Well, at least that still works. “Stand by for a moment, Colonel Sheppard would like a word with you.” Seriously?

He throws Cadman – who wisely chose to stay behind the camera – a short furtive look and sees her just as baffled as himself. “Acknowledged. Standing by, Atlantis Control.”

There’s a short moment of silence, then Sheppard’s voice over the radio. “The hell’s taking you so long, Major? There’s an agitated crowd in the mess hall, waiting to decorate the damn tree.” See, he likes Sheppard. Really, he does. Sometimes, though... “Honestly, if you don’t come back ASAP, I’m afraid I’ll have to deploy SFs suited up for riot control.” Yeah, that’s exactly what throws him off about Sheppard every so often. Sometimes, he really has no idea whether the guy’s serious or not, and *sometimes* that’s really not helpful, at all. Like now, for example.

Making a point of *not* looking in Cadman’s direction – he’s *pretty* sure he just heard her trying to suppress a chuckle – he clears his throat. “Uh, sorry for the delay, sir.” Did he just see Cadman roll her eyes when he glanced up for a moment? “It appears that the locals would like services in exchange for...”

“Did it just start snowing at your end?” What?

He blinks, fully aware that his momentary deer in headlights look will serve to entertain all three control room shifts and possibly a few more for at least a week and then looks up at the gunmetal grey sky. Which promptly leads to him getting hit with snowflakes, *right* into both eyes. It really takes all of his remaining self control and seeing Cadman’s face literally lighting up with surprise and joy to turn back at the camera and be his usual dry self instead of growling right into it. “That would be a yes, sir.”

Surprisingly fast, the flakes have turned from small flurry things into big and soft and... is Cadman *dancing*? “Great, I’m coming over.”

What? Sheppard's sudden announcement takes him so off-guard that he can't help sputter, "What, *now*?" at the camera and Cadman interrupts her impromptu happy dance for a *slightly* exaggerated face palm. Yeah, yeah, not his best cognitive performance, he knows that, okay?

"Sure. Coming through." Wait, *what*?

When he sees Cadman – one of the hardest people to faze he ever encountered – look kind of horrified for a moment, he knows they're screwed. They don't even have any more time to commiserated as the Gate's event horizon ripples and a fully geared up Sheppard steps through. Alone. What the... "Before you ask: Rodney's busy comforting the scientists who didn't get their Christmas presents," awful thought, and he really hopes Rodney won't traumatize too many people, "Ronon got roped into playing Pegasus Santa for the Athosian kids by the Marines and Teyla is currently trying to keep the riots in the mess hall down to a minimum."

Or, in short, Sheppard was bored out of his fucking mind. No wonder Colonel Carter let him go like that. Hell, if he'd been in her stead, he'd probably have shoved Sheppard through the Gate himself.

He also should probably reprimand Cadman for mouthing "Fuck." behind Sheppard's back but that would make him a hypocrite. It's exactly the same thing he just thought. He clenches his jaw just for a moment and then nods. "Fair enough, sir." Behind Sheppard's back, Cadman rolls her eyes, though he can't be sure if it's at him or Sheppard.

Sheppard nods and sets off towards the village, the fresh fallen snow swallowing the sounds of his combat boots. Resigning himself to his fate, he follows Sheppard, Cadman next to him, both of them trudging through the practically picture perfect winter forest, softly falling snowflakes included. He can't even remember when he'd had a white Christmas the last time which throws him off so much that he nearly misses the very faint sound coming from Cadman's direction. Did she just *giggle*?

Not believing his ears, he turns to her and he swears to God he just saw her hide a grin in the folds of her scarf. He glowers at her and commanders her, "Stop laughing."

It earns him raised eyebrows and a totally straight-faced, dry as bone, "I'm not laughing."

Yeah, right. Maybe not, you know, to his face. But he knows her. Her and her damn twisted sense of humor that he usually finds, God help him, endearing. He narrows his eyes. "Yes, you are. Stop it."

Her answer is raising her right hand and putting it on her heart, followed by the way too solemn words, "Scout's honor, I'm *not* laughing."

"I *know* you are." In her head, she is. And he can't deal with the thought of her laughing now, while they're following their commanding officer back to the village. He likes that laughter way too much for him to be thinking of it on the job. He glares at her. "Stop it. This is all your fault, anyway."

Okay, that probably wasn't fair and... "*How* is any of this *my*..."

“Stop flirting, you two.” Sheppard didn’t even have the decency to turn around.

Well. That effectively shuts them *both* up. For about five seconds. Then both of them embarrassingly start denying any flirting attempts at the same time, with way too much vehemence. It really couldn’t have gone any worse, judging from the smirk Sheppard throws them when he does turn around this time for a moment before stepping into the village’s central square.

Now it’s Cadman glaring at *him*, and he can’t even fault her for that. He did start it. For a few seconds, he’s even glad that it’s gotten semi-dark by now. At least that way, hopefully no one will be able to see the blush that must be crawling over his face, if the heat he feels rising in his cheeks is any indication. Then again, it *would* be worth it if he could see Cadman’s face light up with only a fraction of... “Alright, where are Gryffis and Aubeyame and who do I need to talk to about that damn tree thing?”

He doesn’t get to answer because Cadman is faster, probably because she wants to get Sheppard off the whole flirting scent. “MEDCAP, agricultural consultation, the village elder. Sir.” Oh what, Sheppard gets a sir, even a belated one while he only ever gets provocative and ironic ones?

Seriously? Was he just being jealous of Sheppard? Good God.

Sheppard just nods, as if he never noticed the belated “sir”. “You know where to find the elder, Lieutenant?”

She nods. “Yes, sir. If you’d just follow me...” Once again, he has been rendered redundant, and once again, it stings. And the worst thing about this is that he’s being pretty much unfair to both of them. So he just keeps his trap shut, ignores Cadman’s weird inquisitive side look and trudges behind her and Sheppard towards the village elder’s hut. And the snow *just* keeps on falling.

They arrive at the hut and Cadman shortly knocks before entering, Sheppard and he following her inside. If he weren’t in such a foul mood, he’d actually appreciate it. It’s a hut constructed out of wooden beams, kinda like the cabins in the mountains back home, a fire crackling away merrily in a fireplace at the far end of the room, rugs and animal skins on the floor and the low sitting furniture... about the perfect space for spending the holidays. Which makes his mood somehow even fouler. Fuck it.

While he’d been slipping even deeper into Grinch territory, Sheppard seems to have had a little chat with Elder Tengu. Sheppard comes over, bouncing a little on his balls before speaking. “Alright, looks like we’re getting something to do, after all.” What, *now*? Why is it that Sheppard just strolls in and gets assigned something only minutes later, while he... “Who wants to go big game hunting?”

He’d just bet that Cadman almost jumped up and down yelling. “Me, me, me!” but could barely curb her enthusiasm. She certainly *looks* like it, standing behind Sheppard and grinning from ear to ear. Ah, damn, he can never resist her when she looks like *that*. Rolling his eyes and giving a small defeated sigh, he says, “Lieutenant Cadman and I would be glad to help, sir.”

Cadman is just *this* close to flinging her arms around his neck, he can see that. You would think *she* was the one with squat to do for three hours, seriously. Especially because she mouths an enthusiastic “Thank you!” at him behind Sheppard’s back. It has the added benefit of driving him to roll his eyes again and then give her a reluctant little smile. Hopefully, Sheppard didn’t see this little exchange because he’d just make a crack about Cadman having him wrapped around her little finger or something.

“Goody,” Sheppard replies sounding almost jolly when they are back outside, “because apparently, according to Tengu, the path to our tree leads past a big creature with lots of hair and long teeth. We kill the predator, we get our tree.”

“Sounds like fun, sir,” Cadman says and the snowflakes that are still falling down glisten in her hair like sequins in the flickering light of the fires around the central square.

Oh God, he did *not* just think that.

Alright, focus. “Sounds like a cakewalk, sir,” he deadpans, carefully not looking at Cadman, lest it turns into outright staring or some such nonsense.

Sheppard just nods. “Absolutely. Just tell your medic to not to wander off too far, huh?” Right. Rule Number One in the Pegasus Galaxy: if it sounds like a cakewalk, someone is bound to get hurt, usually in an either embarrassing or dangerous fashion.

He nods at Cadman and she gives Gryffis and Aubeyame a heads up as to where they’re heading. He’s pretty sure he heard Gryffis groan over the radio but really, she’s being unfair. She’s been on his team for a year, and she hasn’t had half as much to do as anyone working together with Sheppard’s team.

Then again... they’re going big game hunting with Sheppard. In that light, her groan was a pretty understated reaction. Sheppard for his part, turns toward the edge of the village. The one with the dense, by now dark forest. The forest that looks like something out of Hansel and Gretel. You know, one that says “Do not enter if you don’t want something or someone eating you.” Going hunting there sounds like a *lot* of fun alright.

Suppressing a defeated sigh, he turns to follow Sheppard, Cadman next to him practically *bouncing* across the blanket of snow that’s ever growing thicker. All she needs is a song on her lips and she’d look like a fucking Disney princess. A Disney princess in camo cold weather gear and combat boots, armed to the teeth and with still too much C4 in her leg pockets. Definitely not someone to mess with, and he can’t help but love every minute of it.

Something is definitely wrong with him.

Thankfully, he’s spared from any more revelations like the last one because they just arrived at the edge of the forest and are looking into pitch black dark. Sheppard takes a deep breath. “So,” he mutters, “anyone remembered to take their NVGs with them?”

Yeah, uh, night vision goggles would come in *very* handy now. Such a pity that no one... “Uh, I kinda did, sir.” Aw, *fuck* it. Those fucking damn overprepared...

“Kinda, Lieutenant?” Huh. Did he just imagine it or is Sheppard just as unwilling to go into that forest as he is?

Cadman shrugs. “Well, I didn’t actually bring NVGs but I have really good night vision and...”

“Nope.” For a moment, *just* a moment, he nearly breathed audibly with relief.

That is, until Cadman goes all, “Nope, sir? As in “No, you don’t have really good night...””

“As in, “No, I’m not going in there without NVGs, no matter that Marines come with built-in ones.” Lieutenant.” He... seriously? Did Sheppard just... abort the mission?

Cadman seems to think so, too. And she’s hating it. “But, sir, you just said the crowd in the mess hall...”

“Can wait another night.” Really? From the guy who convincingly told them he was about to send out SFs in riot suppression formation?

He can’t believe it but he actually goes, clears his throat and sides with Cadman, reminding Sheppard, “You did say something about being about to deploy anti-riot forces, sir.”

“Oh, I did,” Sheppard tells him and in the dark he’s not sure if that’s a trademark smug smirk on Sheppard’s face or not. “I did tell you that Teyla decided to take care of the mess hall situation.”

Well... he did. He just thought Sheppard was joking but it appears that he wasn’t. And the thing is: after three years of watching Teyla Emmagan do her thing, he doesn’t find it very farfetched to consider her more effective on a dissatisfied crowd than a flight of SFs or a platoon of Marines. However, disappointment is showing on Cadman’s face and he hates it when he has to disappoint any of his team members. Oh fine. One last attempt. “Sir, are you sure we should abort...”

“Nah, I didn’t say anything about aborting the mission, Major.” He didn’t? “I just said we wouldn’t go in there *now*. And yes, Lieutenant, I can see you pouting even from here.” He... can? And here he thought spotting Cadman’s antics even when not looking at her was a skill no one else but him possessed. His appreciation and respect for Sheppard goes up another notch. “So, how about we call it a night, ask the friendly villagers to take us in until tomorrow and try our hunting luck in the morning?”

That doesn’t sound so bad, actually. He throws Cadman a look – again, something a field grade shouldn’t be doing, since he doesn’t need permission from company grades in any way or shape but fuck that, seriously – and she does pout for a moment but then nods her head. Right. “Fair enough, sir.”

“Good call, Major.” Right. “And don’t even think about giving him shit about it, Cadman.”

She grimaces at the back of Sheppard’s head but *sounds* surprisingly straight-faced when she tells him, “Wouldn’t dare dream of it, sir.”

Sheppard makes a “Yeah, right, how stupid do you think I am?” face but doesn’t further comment on it, just tells him to call Gryffis and Aubeyame off their current tasks and back to Elder Tengu’s hut. They both acknowledge and he trudges back to the central square with Sheppard and Cadman. From there, it’s only a short way to give Elder Tengu a short look into their decision, kindly ask permission to stay the night and get allocated a guest hut.

All fairly standard operating procedure, except Sheppard just shakes his head and grins when he offers to take someone back with him to the Gate and inform Atlantis of the change in plans. It takes him a moment to realize that... Sheppard *planned* it that way. Why, he has no idea, but apparently, Sheppard already told Atlantis not to keep waiting for them which just tells him just *how* badly his commanding officer had been itching to get away from his desk and the paperwork waiting there. Bastard.

And to make it all worse, in the end it turns out that Gryffis, whom Cadman usually rooms with on overnight missions like these, got offered to stay with the family she’d been treating last and didn’t want to refuse so as not to alienate anyone while Aubeyame who’s usually his rooming partner had apparently found a very friendly – *single* – host and didn’t want to be disrespectful, either. Which wouldn’t have been that bad, except that there’s exactly one bed in the room Elder Tengu gave them and... “Well,” Cadman simply says when they’re standing in the doorway to the one room hut and... *grins* at them.

In a really weird, really alluring... “Well,” Sheppard just replies and bounces on the balls of his feet, once and follows it with a smirk.

Well. Three people. One bed. Two people with him who aren’t exactly ugly and/or dumb. Two people who, let’s face it, he finds both pretty much attractive in their own right. Two people... he swallows. Clears his throat. Cricks his neck. “Let’s... uh... make the best of it?”

They both grin.

“Yep,” Sheppard opens.

“Let’s,” Cadman finishes.

So. He can’t help grin himself, now. “After you,” he tells both Cadman and Sheppard and really, as Christmas Eves go... there have been worse ones in his life. If anything, this one suddenly promises to become one of the good ones. One of the *best* ones. Damn, Lorne, he can’t help thinking, when he follows Sheppard and Cadman into the admittedly very warm, very cozy room, just for once, *you* are one lucky bastard.

Very, *very* lucky indeed.

Merry fucking Christmas to him, goddammit.

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