

Draco Unwrapped

by idreamofdraco

A bit of Christmas dancing puts Draco in a bah humbug mood, until Ginny Weasley sheds some light on the world that he has been missing out on. Perhaps Draco has kept himself wrapped up for too long.

Written for cherryredxx in the DG Forum's 2012 Holiday Gift-fic Exchange.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The couple between the hedges danced, oblivious to their audience. Draco Malfoy, not quite hiding in the shadows, watched as the redheaded woman laughed and murmured a few words before she and the dark haired man took up their movement once more, alternately taking steps and spinning in the moonlight. The man faltered again, and laughter floated in the air as the woman attempted to correct his mistake, but Draco knew her effort was futile. Harry Potter didn't have the right breeding to dance properly. Ginevra Weasley didn't either, for that matter, but at least her blood was pure, and everyone knew that dancing was a trait passed down and strengthened in pure-blood families.

Draco listened for a moment longer to the muted Christmas music emanating from within the Parkinson mansion, and his eyes flickered to the swarms of twirling couples that he could see through the window. Inside, hordes of people who would not have associated with each other five years ago socialized civilly...gaily, actually. There was no sign of tension or disrespect or even reluctance among the attendees. As unlikely as it seemed, everyone was friends, or willing to become so.

The atmosphere was a little too friendly for Draco, who...though he tolerated people like Potter and the riffraff with whom he associated...still found it difficult to blend in with this society. After the war, the Malfoy family had been avoided by both their comrades and their enemies...one in fear, the other in revulsion. Things had gotten better after Draco's father had gone to Azkaban and Draco and his mother had served their two years of house arrest. By the time they had been released, new bonds had been formed between the old pure-blood families and post-war society. People like the Parkinsons and the Notts had legitimately worked their way into the Ministry of Magic and made allies, while Draco and his mother were only just beginning the process. Three years later, even as a respected financier in the Ministry, Draco still sensed a wall between him and his coworkers and former classmates, and he wasn't sure if it was a wall he wanted to break down.

With the last strains of "Yule in the Crystal Cave" dying out, Draco extinguished his cigarette against the side of the building (a nasty habit he had taken up thanks to Theodore Nott's disgusting interest in certain aspects of Muggle culture) and took a step out of the shadows. Potter and Weasley were ending their dance with a bow and a curtsy, and Draco sneered at the display. If anyone's life had turned out A-OK after the war with nary a consequence to be had, it was Potter. He saved the world, got the girl, was well-loved and respected by everyone on the face of the planet... As always, the good guy won in every possible way.

"I think I've got the hang of it now. Thanks, Ginny," Potter said as he pushed his glasses farther up his nose. In Draco's opinion, his smile was idiotic.

As he approached, Draco said, "It's too bad all that instruction will go to waste."

The couple's heads turned, but Draco was not met with the hostile glares he had expected.

"Why is that, Malfoy?" Potter asked.

"Wait! Wait! Let me take a guess," Weasley said before Draco could speak. Her brows met at a thoughtful angle and her lips pursed. "Because everyone knows Malfoys are the experts at dancing?" she asked, mocking him.

For a moment, Draco was flabbergasted about the preemptive strike. And then Weasley grinned at him, this half-smirking sort of turn of her lips that was off-putting and unexpected. *He* was supposed to be the smirker around here!

"Uh..."

"Well, if you're so brilliant at it, why don't you show Harry the dance?" Weasley insisted, grabbing the paralyzed Draco's arm and tugging him towards Potter, who backed away and tried to cover his laughter in his sleeve.

"That's alright, Ginny," Potter said. "I think I'm going to give it a go before I forget the moves."

"Good luck!" Weasley called after him. "Knock her knickers off!"

Potter disappeared around a hedge, leaving Draco with Weasley. She was smiling warmly after Potter, and then she looked at him, but instead of her lips dropping, the smile remained. Draco was unsettled by how agreeably she behaved around him. In the three years since he'd served his sentence, he had run into Weasley at the Ministry often enough. At first, there had been glares, and Draco had felt like he had been back in the corridors of Hogwarts, passing by distrustful Weasleys on his way to Transfiguration. Then there had been wariness, as Draco had yet to earn anyone's trust. After that, he couldn't remember what expression she or anyone else had worn on their faces when he'd run into them during the course of his days. Perhaps he'd simply been absorbed, his presence noted, scrutinized, and ultimately ignored.

"Why aren't you accompanying your boyfriend?" Draco asked, and he suddenly felt distrustful of her. How could she tease him as if they were schoolchildren, smile at him so easily, and then loiter outside alone with him while her lover left?

The quizzical look on her face was half amused. "Seriously? Harry and I broke up, oh, nearly two years ago."

Confounded, he asked, "Then why did you come here together?"

"To make Parkinson jealous."

Allowing his jaw to drop would have been unbecoming public behavior for a Malfoy. However, it seemed as though Weasley saw right through him to the shock he was feeling.

"Yeah, strange, right? Their offices are on the same floor, and occasionally they'll have a chat, but he's still working up to asking her out. So he asked me to come to the party with him and teach him how to dance. I told him she would find his lack of dancing skills endearing, but he didn't believe me and insisted on being taught. Are you all right?"

She muttered, "*Aguamenti!*" into a pine cone-transfigured cup and pressed the water into Draco's hands. He drank greedily in order to stop the choking noises that were emitting from his throat.

"Fine," he rasped. "Just..."

"Shocking, right? But I really think Seamus and Blaise took the cake where odd couples are concerned. No, seriously, are you all right there, Malfoy?"

She summoned another cup of water for him while leading him to a bench near a willow tree. As he gulped the water down, she alternated between patting his back and rubbing soothing circles on it while murmuring consoling nothings like his mum used to do when he was little.

Finally in control of himself, though maybe not quite his voice, Draco croaked, "*Finnegan? And Zabini?*"

"Well, I know it's a little strange, but, come on, it's 2004 already," Weasley said.

"When... when did that happen?"

"Over a year ago. They caused a really big fuss; are you sure you don't remember it?"

Draco shrugged his shoulder and her arm dropped back down. "No. I don't recall ever hearing about that."

"Malfoy, where have you been?" He didn't have to look at her to know that the expression on her face was incredulous. He could hear it perfectly clearly in her voice. "Don't you notice anything going on around you?"

Irritation made him prickly. He stood up and marched off, deciding he'd do better inside the party where everyone would be too busy ignoring him.

"Oh, come on. Don't be like that! What else don't you know?" Weasley asked as she followed after him. "In case you were wondering, Kingsley Shacklebolt is going up for reelection for Minister of Magic!"

"Will you let me escape in peace?" he cried with a long suffering sigh.

"Is that what you've been doing for the past three years? Escaping everyone?"

Draco stopped and spun around, which also made Weasley stop in her tracks. "What are you talking about?"

"Tell me, why did you come to the party tonight?" she asked. Her arms were crossed over her chest, and her expression demanded an answer.

As they stopped in the light of the full moon, Draco noticed for the first time what she was wearing: a deep blue silk gown with a short train that pooled around her feet. Obviously the material was charmed with a water-wicking spell to keep her dry from the snow, and over her bare arms she wore a shawl made of some kind of fur. Her pale skin glowed in the moonlight, which made the freckles on her face and around her collarbone stand out. Against the snowy backdrop, she looked ghostly and ethereal, and he'd never seen her look so... well, above her station. She didn't look like the Weasley he remembered from Hogwarts, an annoying brat who had hung onto every word out of Potter's mouth. She looked like she actually belonged at a party at the Parkinson mansion.

"I was invited," Draco finally said.

"Yes, but you've been invited to a number of parties over the years and you never show up. So why this one?"

Draco stared at her arms, at the freckles dotting her skin, at her hands and fingers, which had to be freezing. Her breath came out in frosty puffs, and suddenly he could feel exactly how cold it was. He hadn't noticed before, when he'd been smoking in the shadows, watching Potter and Weasley from afar.

Instead of answering, he asked. "What are you doing at this party?" The truth was, he didn't really know the answer to her question. When he'd received the invitation

clutched within the claws of his own eagle owl, he'd simply picked up a quill and RSVPed, no thought involved. Draco remembered receiving similar party invitations in the past three years, and he'd always ignored them, sure that they hadn't been meant for him. But who else could they have been meant for? His name had been handwritten on each and every card.

"Since you've obviously been checked out for the past few years, I'll tell you."

"Please do."

She rolled her eyes. "Pansy Parkinson happens to be one of my very closest friends. I attend all her parties, and she attends all mine. Though mine, I'll admit, aren't as grand as hers."

This time, Draco managed not to react at all, though inside he was reeling. So many things had changed since the war. He knew that, of course, but even though he'd heard that most of his old Slytherin classmates had been accepted by society, seeing it firsthand was strange, to say the least. If Parkinson, Nott, and Zabini could manage to fit in, why couldn't Draco?

"Lovely," he replied through tight lips. Then he continued his march back to the mansion.

Behind him he heard laughter, and then Weasley was putting her hands on Draco's person, spinning him around to laugh right in his face.

"Are you jealous?" she asked, mirth sparking annoyingly in her eyes. Actually, that was probably the reflection of the moon, Draco amended. The mere notion that her muddy brown eyes could sparkle was ridiculous.

"Why would I be jealous?" he asked, his teeth clenched tight as his annoyance deepened.

"Malfoy, it's your own fault if you feel left out!" she said as if the idea were obvious.

"I'd really like to get back to the party."

"Listen. Just listen!" she said, pulling on his arm again. Another long-suffering sigh escaped as Draco turned back towards her, making it painfully clear that he was put out by her irritating behavior. In a softer voice, Weasley said, "We've made efforts to include you, you idiot. Not only by inviting you to the parties, but also to our outings and dinners and whatnot. Malfoy, you're the one who turns us down! We want you to be friends with us!" Now her gaze dropped and she looked less certain of herself than she did before. "I thought you didn't want to be our friend. And that's okay if you don't, but don't ever say we didn't try to be yours."

He could tell she was sincere. Of course she was. No Gryffindor had the sophistication to pretend to want to make nice, just to turn around and make a fool out of him. Her cheeks bloomed with color, a deeper shade of red than her cold-whipped skin had had previously. Perhaps she was embarrassed by her admission. Actually, Draco was a little embarrassed, too, if the sudden heat he could feel in his face was anything to go by.

He cleared his throat to make sure his voice would come out in one piece. "Why would you want to be friends with me? And who do you mean by 'we'?"

Weasley shrugged. "The usual people. Me, Pansy, Harry, Theo, sometimes Seamus and Blaise, Luna, and Millicent."

"Bulstrode?"

"The one and only. We figured you would be lonely after your house arrest. Pansy, Millicent, Theo, and Blaise knew how it felt to try to fit back in with people. And Harry, Seamus, Luna, and I knew how everyone else would treat you."

"All right, but why? Why even bother? I did so many things wrong during the war."

She made that quizzically amused face again, and when her hand landed on his arm, he didn't shrug out of the touch. "Malfoy, that's what your house arrest was for. The war was years ago, and you served your time. When Harry spoke on your behalf at your trial, he made it clear how you should be treated. He didn't do anything consciously, except tell the truth, but his word had a lot of weight in the Ministry, even before he started working there. If Harry Potter said Draco and Narcissa Malfoy weren't as bad as they seemed, then no one else would question him about it. And that's been true since the war. There are people who still see you for what you were back then, but no one blames you for it."

No one, that was, except Draco. It was starting to dawn on him that he was the only person still holding himself accountable for what he'd done during the war. Everyone else had moved on. Grown up.

"So why did you come to this party? Why not any of the others?" Weasley asked.

Draco thought back to the day he'd received the invitation, trying to remember what he'd been doing at the time, trying to remember why he'd decided to accept this one. Weasley waited patiently in silence, but Draco found it disconcerting the way she kept watching him, steadily and with a small smile on her face.

"My mum has gone on a holiday for Christmas," he said. "The manor is too big for just the two of us, with Father and all the house-elves... gone. I guess she wanted to be alone. She left me a note at the beginning of the month telling me that she had left, but I don't know where she is or when she'll be back."

The tight feeling in his throat refused to go away, no matter how many times Draco tried to swallow it down. He hated the way he was feeling, and he hated that he was sharing it with a Weasley of all people. Why hadn't she just let him insult Potter like he'd wanted to? Why did she have to butt in and counter him, and then make him look like a fool in ten different ways? Suddenly his eyes began to sting, but Draco blamed that on the snow that had started to fall. Obviously, he'd gotten a snowflake in his eye.

Weasley's hand moved up Draco's arm to his shoulder, and then she placed her other hand on his other shoulder. Suddenly, she was pressed up against his body and her arms were around his neck, her hold on him unyielding and warm. For several moments, Draco refused to react to her embrace, leaving his arms at his sides in stiff protest against her concern. But he felt silly, not for the first time tonight, and he was beginning to see that all his problems in the last three years had been caused by his own silliness.

So he put his arms around her as well. When his hands touched her back, he pulled her against him even more. Because the shawl insufficiently covered her, he could feel her skin goose-pimpling from the cold. He felt her whole body move when she inhaled deeply, the sound she made as she did so one of surprise, and then she let the breath go.

Snow continued to fall faster with each moment that passed, and Draco found the sight of her red hair freckled with snow idiotically fascinating. After more heartbeats than he could count, Weasley finally stepped away, her face and ears beet red with embarrassment.

Draco retracted his arms, returning them to their stiff position at his sides. He cleared his throat and said to a tree, "Thanks, Weasley."

"You can call me Ginny." She smiled at him, and even though Draco knew he was awesome enough to deserve smiles, he still wondered why. Why did she bother with him? Why did any of her friends (who consisted of some of his former friends...now that was hard to wrap his head around) want to bother with him? So many years of animosity, and she was acting like none of them existed.

Instead of voicing any of those thoughts, he replied in kind. "Then... I guess you can call me Draco."

Her smile grew wider. "I will. Now let's get inside and dance where it's warm."

She interlocked their arms and tugged him back to the mansion, and even though Draco wanted to distance himself from her with his trademark sneer in place, he let her

lead him. Working on his own, being alone, apparently hadn't worked for him for the past three years. Maybe if he let someone else direct him for a little while, his life would stop feeling so empty.

As soon as they stepped inside the mansion, Draco's whole body surged with heat, and his feet, frozen solid from the cold, began to burn in their numbness. As they entered the ballroom, heads turned, but Draco noticed Parkinson laughing in Potter's arms as he tripped over his own feet, and Zabini and Finnegan standing close to each other as they conversed with some of Draco's coworkers. He took a good look around himself for the first time in who knew how long, and saw the progress that had been made after the war. War criminals and upright citizens intermingled in friendship as Christmas music moved them to laugh and dance and even sing.

A kiss landed on Draco's cheek, and rather than the anger he thought he should feel, Draco was actually pleased. Weasley pointed above their heads, where a sprig of mistletoe hung in the doorway.

"Happy Christmas, Draco," she said.

Then she pushed him out onto the dance floor, and someone shouted, "Hey! Look who's finally joined the party!" Party-goers converged on him, patted his back, shook his hand, and dragged him into conversation after conversation.

Draco genuinely smiled for the first time in years. He forgot that his mother had disappeared, leaving him and her memories behind for her own mental health. This Christmas he would work on putting his own memories behind him, as well as the guilt and anger and bitterness that went along with them.

It was a Christmas for new beginnings.