

The Joke's On Us

by idreamofdraco

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Ginny couldn't believe how she had been suckered. She had spent the last few years trying to rid herself of her feelings of familial obligation, but they had returned to bite her in the arse.

"Come on, Ginny!" George cried. The raspy sound of her name being drawn out pleadingly sounded like his dying breath, and Ginny couldn't help but put her hand to his forehead in concern.

"You are rather hot..."

"It's not very hard! Verity's got to man the store. Someone else has to do it."

"Why me?" she whined. "Why not get some Hogwarts kid looking for a summer job?"

The look on George's face was so scathing, Ginny would have thought she'd suggested he hire a Death Eater instead.

"It's a family business, you nitwit. I'm not going to let any ol' riff raff handle my goods!"

"Just Verity, is that right?"

His nose crinkled in distaste. "She is not riff raff, and she happens to take very good care of my goods."

Ginny really should have known better than to try to ruffle or embarrass her brother, as the twins had always been immune to such schemes, and it hadn't mattered anyway. She had been won over...or guilted...by his big, brown, cold-cruised eyes.

After she had Apparated to her location, she grumbled to herself, wondering why a joke shop would even bother offering a delivery service. She pulled a package out of a bag hanging from her shoulder and fidgeted with her outfit as she walked to the front door. The uniform consisted of hot pink robes (George's robes were such a bright orange, they managed to make his hair look less red than it really was) that flashed the Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes logo across the back in purple sparkles. It was the most obnoxious article of clothing she had ever had the misfortune to wear, but George had insisted that she had to.

"Advertising, Ginny! Advertising!"

"What are you trying to do?" she had asked in exasperation. "Blind the neighbors?"

"We're creating a memorable WWW experience that no one will forget."

Ginny had mumbled, "Yeah, no one will forget because my image will be burned into their eye sockets for an eternity," and then smiled at George's weak glare, flouncing out of his bedroom to the sound of his hacking coughs.

Now, standing at the front door of the kind of mansion that only existed in her dreams, she tried to fix the glower on her face, her brother's voice grating against her brain as it reminded her to smile at the customers.

"Smile, my arse..." she grumbled as she stared down a white peacock she wasn't sure she hadn't imagined.

"And what a brightly colored arse it is."

"Excuse me?" she started to say, before she realized who had spoken. Her face turned red faster than she could have Apparated away from there, but the damage was done.

Draco Malfoy had seen her in the atrocious robes.

"My arse is none of your concern!" She looked down at the piece of parchment in her hand. "I'm looking for a... Oh. That's you."

"What's with the look of distaste? If you hadn't noticed, I'm dressed impeccably. You're the one who looks like Dr. Filibuster threw up on a rainbow."

She grimaced before she could stop herself and couldn't help but admit that his words were true. Where her robes captured a person's attention in a horrific way, his drew the eye in and kept it lingering. It was wholly unfair how the deep blue of his ensemble flattered his skin while the cut and style accentuated his lean frame. He looked delicious, and Ginny wanted to punch him in the appendix for daring to look so good.

"Just sign here," she said, shoving the parchment and a quill at his chest.

"Have I upset you? I apologize," he said, the accompanying smirk ruining any facade of sincerity he could have attempted.

As he took his sweet time signing his name, Ginny tried to control her temper. She'd already been in a foul mood, and seeing Malfoy's face, as well as being on the receiving end of his ridicule, this early in the morning only made it worse.

"There you are," he said, handing the parchment back over.

Her eyes narrowed with shrewd attention as she gave him his package wrapped in orange paper, tied with purple twine. "What are you ordering from my brother, anyway? Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder?" she asked.

His sudden burst of laughter at first startled and then angered her, but she was too angry, too embarrassed, to say anything.

"Isn't that cute! You're trying to throw a rock at me, but I just can't take you seriously in those robes," he said, wiping tears of amusement from his eyes. "Thanks for the package, Weasley. Until later."

Ginny's blood pounded when the door closed in her face with a final and loud snap, which broke her temper loose and wild.

"You have a whimsically wacky Wednesday!" she howled at the door, stomping away from the mansion and Disapparating with a louder crack than usual.

George had trained her so well, even her dislike of a customer could not break her from it.

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"How's George today?" Ginny asked Verity with all the innocence of a child angling to get something from her parents.

"He told me to tell you he's feeling abysmally appalling," she replied, never looking up from loading Ginny's batch of deliveries into her shoulder bag.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he's living it up, not having to work and all," Ginny grumbled.

Verity packed up the last of the packages and then handed the bag over to her sister-in-law, looking at her for the first time.

"You don't really think that, do you? You know how much George loves this store."

Ginny sighed. She really wasn't being fair. Her bad mood after meeting Malfoy the day before yesterday had persisted well after the encounter, causing her to snap irrationally at both Verity and George.

It was true that her brother was somewhat of a workaholic. Since Fred's death, he had run the shop at an exhausting pace that no one else could keep up with, except for Verity, who had worked at Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes when Fred was alive and so was familiar with the twins' manner of working. She was the only person who kept George from working to the point of collapse, though oftentimes it was a close call. It was common for him to do the work of two people instead of delegating some tasks to others willing to help.

It had been a Fred and George business, and he still maintained it as such.

"I know. I'm just irritated and taking it out on other people."

"Well, here," Verity said, reaching under the counter and pulling out a tiny vial of potion. "Take two drops of this."

Ginny eyed the potion shrewdly, her experience with Fred and George's products imbuing her with caution.

Relaxation Restorative

Super-effective results when used with our Patented Daydream Charm!

"What's this?"

"Oh, George was having some problems with new batches of the Daydream Charms, so he started bottling Draught of Peace and selling that as well, and it seemed to help."

"What kind of problems?" Ginny asked sceptically.

"Nothing much. People were having a hard time getting the daydreams to work when they were feeling stressed, which, of course, is why they bought the charm in the first place. We sell the draught a little more expensively than you can get at an apothecary. Of course we've got our name on ours, which no one takes very seriously." Verity winked at Ginny, which was something she liked to do often, as if to give a joke that extra punch of jokeyness. "Take it if you feel you need it. We would like our reputation to be that of fun-loving extremists, not grouches with an odd sense of humor."

Ginny mumbled under her breath as Verity retreated to the back room to take inventory of the new products to be revealed later that month, but as soon as she was out of sight, she dispensed two drops of the potion onto her tongue.

She felt the effects immediately.

Her whole body went numb for a good three seconds, and as the numbness faded, a dopey smile came to her face. Suddenly, she couldn't quite remember the cause of her irritation, and the idea of delivering packages for half the morning no longer seemed such a tedious task. She couldn't even manage to frown when she looked through her list of deliveries for the day and saw Draco Malfoy's name right in the middle of it. The information vaguely interested her and niggled at her curiosity.

It was half-eleven when she finally Apparated to the Malfoys' manor, and the potion had not worn off yet. She gave the door knocker a good knock, sighing at one of the white peacocks staring at her alertly, its head cocked to the side.

Malfoy opened the door with a smirk already firmly in place. As Ginny smiled at him, his lips twitched, the smirk faltering uncertainly.

"What is it today, Malfoy?" Ginny asked, retrieving his package from her bag. "A Daydream Charm?"

His brows nit together, still baffled by her behavior...especially after the last time she'd delivered his package...but he grinned at her anyway, something slightly feral in his eyes, though she didn't notice.

"How did you guess?"

"Oh, I have my ways," she replied with a small laugh.

"Are you alright, Weasley? Have you been inhaling excessive amounts of Potter's cologne or something?"

This comment normally would have irked her, but the Relaxation Restorative kept her calm. Even so, Ginny knew perfectly well that she was supposed to be annoyed, but instead of retaliating with a scathing remark, she replied in an even voice, smile still in place.

"I haven't been inhaling excessive amounts of anything, let alone Potter's cologne. I mean Harry." She shook her head. "Not that it's any of your concern, but I haven't been seeing him for months. If anyone is inhaling his cologne, it's probably Millicent Bulstrode."

The package Malfoy had just taken out of Ginny's hands slipped, but he managed to catch it in numb fingers before it met the ground.

"M-M-Millicent? And *Potter*?"

"That is what I said. They make such a lovely couple, though. Harry's hair is almost the same shade of black as Milly's eyebrow."

"Milly?" he repeated, his face one of someone who'd just heard that Death Eaters were throwing a birthday party for the Muggle Prime Minister. Was it really so hard to believe that Harry could find unibrows attractive? Or that scars got Millicent all hot and bothered?

Ginny held out her sheet of parchment and offered him a quill, waiting patiently as he composed himself enough to sign.

"Thank you for your business! Have a fantastically flatulent Friday!" she said after he'd squiggled his signature. She was oblivious to Malfoy watching her all the way down the drive until she Disapparated.

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"So what did Malfoy order?" Ginny asked Verity later that day, after the restorative's effects had faded and she could look back on the way she'd behaved with an embarrassed cringe.

"You know I can't tell you that," her sister-in-law replied without looking up from a pile of receipts. "Your job is just to deliver."

Ginny was unconcerned by such details. "There can't be any harm in me knowing!"

"There can't be any harm in you not knowing, too."

"Are you hiding it on purpose?" Ginny asked in a fit of exasperation only made complete by her throwing her hands up in the air and rolling her eyes.

"Yes. Now will you please go home? George is still resting and *must* get the accounts balanced. He may be able to do everything on his own, but I certainly can't."

Pouting, Ginny muttered, "What am I? Chopped liver?"

"Diced, not chopped. Now scram!"

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"This is ridiculous!" Ginny cried on Monday morning, after Verity handed her the list of deliveries she was to make that day.

"It's just one more day. George had enough strength to fight me when I tied him to the bed this morning, so you know he'll definitely be here tomorrow."

"No, not that," Ginny replied, shaking the piece of parchment in front of her sister-in-law's face. "Malfoy ordered something *again*. I just want to know what he's buying!"

Verity stopped what she was doing...though Ginny was so worked up, she hadn't paid much attention...and looked at the pacing redhead with a slight frown on her face. "What's it to you, honestly?"

Startled, Ginny paused, confused by the question. "What?"

"I don't understand why you are taking this so personally."

"I'm not! I...I'm just...I mean, aren't *you* curious at all?"

"I don't judge our customers based on what they've purchased. I love George very much, and I respect his business. I think he's brilliant. And anything he makes is just as brilliant as he is. I am happy that people find enjoyment in his products, no matter who they are. I think you should just let this go. You are making a big deal out of nothing."

Ginny couldn't help but feel properly chastised and somewhat resentful for the lecture, but as she prepared to leave, she noticed Verity frown, her hand resting gently on her stomach.

That explained it all.

As she left the store to Disapparate in the street, a smile appeared on her lips, and she wondered whether George knew yet that soon he was going to have another mouth to feed.

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"If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were stalking me," Malfoy said upon opening the door. Ginny already had the piece of parchment held out for him to sign, which he did.

"And if I didn't know any better, I'd say the same thing," Ginny replied with a roll of her eyes.

"How am I stalking you?" he asked, leaning against the door frame, his arms crossed over his chest.

"You've been ordering things regularly, haven't you? And I'm always the one delivering. You *must* be doing it just to see me." She had a smug look on her face as she pulled out Malfoy's package. "But of course I know better than that."

Even though she offered his package to him, he didn't take it. He was staring at her face, the intensity of his gaze causing Ginny to flush. Her eyes darted around, suddenly too uncomfortable to look right at him.

"Who says you're wrong?"

Her eyes met his again, her expression disbelieving.

"That's absurd! How could you possibly have known I would be the one delivering your packages? This isn't even my job! I'm just filling in!"

"Oh, it's true. I didn't know you would walk right up to my doorstep. That was a pleasant coincidence. The last two deliveries were completely intentional, though."

She floundered for words, her mouth opening and closing but no sound coming out. Malfoy took a step out of the doorway, closing the distance between them with such confidence that Ginny couldn't move because it felt so right, even though she knew it was wrong.

"B-b-but we're so different! Like... like... hot and cold, or sweet and sour, or..."

"Slytherin and Gryffindor?"

"Yes! Exactly!"

She didn't realize, but she was tugging on a piece of her hair and Malfoy found it absolutely fascinating the way she did so.

"Well, maybe," he replied in a low voice, taking another step closer to her, "I'm the sweet to your sour."

"Excuse me! I'm *not* the sour one!"

He rolled his eyes and humored her. "Of course you're not, of course you're not."

"Why don't you tell me what you've been ordering?" she asked, a nervous tremble in her voice. No one had come onto her this strongly in ages, and certainly no one like Malfoy, of all people. Not while she was working. Not after she and Harry had broken up. She wasn't quite sure how to behave, whether she should be flattered or wary. Should she accept his advances or deny them?

"Because it's really none of your business," he replied, something hard in his tone. It peaked her interest, made her suspicious.

"You're right. It's not. But I'd like to know..." she said with a coquettish eye flutter that would have frightened her had she witnessed it herself. Ginny Weasley did ~~not~~ coquettish.

It seemed as though Malfoy was not immune to such feminine wiles. His eyes shifted away from staring at her long eyelashes, and even though before he was the one advancing on her, invading her personal space and trying to charm her with his nearness, now he took a step back.

"I'm not telling you a thing, you nosy woman!"

She dropped the act with a simultaneous frustrated stomp of her foot. "What happened to being your sour?"

"That doesn't give you any right to know everything about me!"

"If you don't tell me right now, I'll see for myself!" she cried, tightening her grip on his package. She bet he was regretting not taking it from her earlier.

His eyes narrowed dangerously, but the effect was lost on Ginny, who had grown up under the eyes of an expert glarer: her own mum.

"You wouldn't."

She stared at him challengingly as her fingernails dug underneath the edge of the wrapping, watching as he flinched at the sound of the paper tearing. He dove at her, trying to snatch the parcel out of her hands, but she moved it behind her back. They stood in his doorway, struggling in a half-hug for dominance, determined not to give up until one of them was the true victor of the Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes joke product.

But the result of the battle was beyond their control. Both of them managed to get a hold of the package and yank at the exact same moment. With an ear-splitting rip, the product fell out of the paper and onto the floor, where both Malfoy and Ginny stared at it and tried to catch their breaths.

Malfoy stood frozen watching Ginny's face as it contorted into a mixture of expressions, until, finally, a laugh tore out of her mouth without restraint. She doubled over, guffawing and slapping her knees and just making a complete fool of herself. The longer he looked at her, the angrier he became.

"G-G-Guaranteed Ten-Second Pimple Vanisher!" she shrieked. "You've been ordering pimple-removing solution!"

"Yes, yes. You've had your laugh at me," he muttered moodily. "Get up. You look like an idiot."

"I'm sorry! No, really, I am. I just... wasn't expecting that," she replied, wiping her eyes of joyful tears as she straightened up.

"No, you were expecting Instant Darkness Powder," he said bitterly.

"I really didn't know what to think!" She finally got a glimpse of his face and couldn't help her smile from growing at the sight of it. "Awww. Come on, Malfoy! It's not a big deal that you have pimples!"

She burst out in a fit of more laughter. Malfoy eyed her with disgust for a few seconds before he rolled his eyes, picked up his package, and went back in the house, leaving her to her insanity.

"H-have a m-marvelously medieval M-Monday!" she called between breaths. She was still laughing when she Disappeared away.

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"You seem very chipper today," Verity said.

"Oh, I am!" George and Ginny replied simultaneously.

George took a deep breath through his nose, exhaling loudly. "Ah! The sky is blue, the clouds are white, and there are people in need of joke products. Glad to be back at work!"

He rushed off to the back room with an eager bounce in his step.

Verity eyed him as he departed, but as soon as he'd left, she turned to Ginny. "Well? What about you? Didn't overdose on the Relaxation Restorative, did you?"

"No, no," Ginny replied with a laugh. "I've been doing a lot of thinking since yesterday, and now I've just got one last delivery to make."

"Is that so?"

"Yep."

"We're not paying you for extra days."

The redheaded girl laughed. "I know." She picked up a parcel from the counter, tucking it into a pocket in her cloak, but before she reached the door, she addressed her sister-in-law again.

"Yes?"

"The sooner you tell George, the better."

Verity's brows knit in confusion. "Tell him what?"

"I'm just saying. If he knows a baby is on the way, maybe he won't work himself sick again."

"How did you...!"

But Ginny had already closed the door behind her.

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This time when he answered the door, he was scowling.

"What do you want?"

"I brought you a gift," she replied, smiling as she held out the package to him.

"Is this some kind of a joke?" he asked, looking less than happy, but he accepted it without protest.

Ginny continued to smile while she rocked on her heels, her hands clasped behind her back innocently. When he unwrapped a package of Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder, his glower deepened.

"It's a promise. Almost. I'm not the type of girl to kiss on the first date, so maybe in a month or two...if we see each other for that long...we can find some use for it."

He caught her drift and his face softened just enough to allow himself a smirk.

"Who says I like it in the dark?"

Ginny merely grinned as she stepped away from the doorstep backwards.

"Have a terribly titillating Tuesday, Malfoy."

"Oh, I plan to," he replied with a leer.

Written for HumbugGirl in Interhouse Fest 2010.

Prompt:

1. You're the sweet to my sour.
2. Ginny takes a temporary job as a delivery girl. Draco ends up ordering stuff just to see her.