

The Best Gift

By Kracken

"I told you, no gifts! I don't do Christmas!" Heero slapped the last file into his out box and glared at Duo over the top of the stack. Hot blue eyes, under rough cut dark hair, a Preventer agent service revolver on his desk close to hand, and a reputation for being a hard ass, should have made anyone back off. Not Duo.

"It's just a little something, Scrooge," Duo complained as he edged the small, gold wrapped gift box on Heero's desk closer to him. His three foot long braid and large purple eyes made him look like an irreverent imp even in his Preventer uniform. With hands on hips, he leaned forward a little and said firmly, tie dangling together with his braid, "It's not like I have anyone else to celebrate with. Work with me, here."

Heero kept glaring, ignoring the box even though Duo was pushing it around the things on his desk towards him, as if he were making an assault in battle. "I am not going to get you anything in return."

"You don't give to get," Duo retorted, his expression looking like a petulant child's. "It's supposed to be about more than that."

"Doesn't seem like it to me," Heero grumbled, as he brought up a mission roster on his computer screen. "Everyone loses their mind at Christmas, buying crap that most people don't even like." He nodded to the small gift. "I bet that's aftershave. I don't wear it, so I'll save you the trouble."

"You're wrong," Duo replied, straightening and rocking a bit on his heels as if he were embarrassed. "It's something you need."

Without taking his attention off the screen, Heero shot back, without thought, "How the hell do you know what I need?"

There was silence on Duo's end of the desk for a long moment. Heero refused to apologize, even though he was feeling a sharp pang of remorse. He didn't want to hurt Duo, but he wasn't about to pretend to buy into a holiday that he had never celebrated and couldn't see the point of. He had the feeling that if he gave in now, he would be locked into celebrating it against his will. He had plans for the braided idiot, after all, long term plans that included a home together and a relationship, if he could ever work up the nerve to ask.

The gift box was placed directly on Heero's keyboard and then Duo stepped back. "Open it when you can't stand the suspense any more, you grumpy bastard."

Heero flicked the gift off his keyboard and it tumbled next to his revolver. It really was very small and Heero's curiosity was peeked as to what could possibly fit into it. He wouldn't succumb, though. He was determined. He did have to ask, "Did you give the others a gift as well?"

"Yes," Duo replied. "Actually, I gave the same gift; one for each of the five most important people in my life."

Meaning he wasn't more important? Heero lost his remorse. He felt hurt. He didn't want to be the same as their fellow pilots. Not to Duo. He couldn't show it, though, not surrounded by a room full of Preventer agents.

"Why?" Heero asked and finally met Duo's eyes, leaning back in his chair until it creaked. "They don't celebrate Christmas, either."

"Maybe it's not about Christmas," Duo replied softly. "Maybe it's about what we all need? Christmas just seemed a good day for you to find out what that is."

"And you think you know?" Heero was feeling, not only skeptical, but bitter. Christmas was about giving gifts, celebrating the birth of Jesus, and being with family. The first he didn't like, the second wasn't part of his religion, and the third was a painful reminder of what he lacked. "I don't share your religion."

"You don't have to share it," Duo replied and smiled, "You just have to take the gift I'm giving you." He reached out and put the gift back on Heero's keyboard. "I especially want to give this gift to you."

Heero felt warmth and a wave of amazement. "Especially?" he echoed, hardly daring to hope.

"Especially," Duo confirmed.

Duo left him with the gift, then, and Heero found himself opening it. The slip of paper with its invitation was a puzzle at first, but when he showed up at Father Maxwell's Mission on Christmas day, and found the other pilots there as well with Duo smiling broadly at them all, he did understand.

They were together, serving food and joining in a celebration that included many less fortunate than themselves, many desperate for a simple meal, companionship, and a sense of belonging, of family, on a day that made people long for those things above all other days. When Duo leaned into Heero, as they served food, and stole a kiss, Heero felt that he had never received any gift as wonderful as that day.

"Sometimes, you have to choose your family," Duo told him lovingly, "and celebrate being together."

"Thank you," Heero told him and saw the other pilots smiling and nodding their similar sentiments.

Duo took Heero's hand and said, "It doesn't have to be just for one day."

Heero squeezed Duo's hand. "I think your gift can easily last a lifetime, at least for the two of us."

Duo grinned. "See? You did give me a gift after all, and you didn't even have to wrap it." He leaned in for another kiss.

Wu Fei, one of the other pilots, interrupted, his dark eyes snapping with temper and his oriental features making him seem imperious, as he rapped Heero sharply on the arm with a spatula. "Indulge in that sort of behavior later! We have food to serve!"

"Later, after we're done here," Duo promised Heero.

Heero, despite that enticement, found himself reluctant for the day to end. There was a comfort and joy in giving and in making sure that others felt the same sense of family, of belonging, that he was experiencing. Watching the always temperamental Wu Fei making sure the elderly were served and cared for in the press of the crowd, fair haired Quatre Winner handing out candy canes to the children with good natured enthusiasm, and Trowa Barton, always by his side and clearly appreciative even armored in his quiet reserved nature, Heero had to recall that he had planned to spend the day bitter and alone, instead. He was certain that they had all made the same plans. Duo had saved them all with his gift, a gift that had taught them that family was where you found it.

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