

A Christmas for Aberforth

by MMADfan

When Aberforth's plans for Christmas are ruined, Minerva has an idea.

Written for pinkie for the CR Christmas Exchange, 2008. Fluffy flashfic.

Christmas Eve

Chapter 1 of 1

When Aberforth's plans for Christmas are ruined, Minerva has an idea.

Written for pinkie for the CR Christmas Exchange, 2008. Fluffy flashfic.

Author's Notes: Written for Pinkie for the Charming Roots Christmas Gift Exchange. Merry Christmas, Pinkie!

Inspired by Pinkie's favourite Christmas carol, "De herdertjes lagen bij nachte." (Not a songfic.)

Characters: Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall, Aberforth Dumbledore...with special guest appearances by Flossie and Mirabelle!



24 December 1964

"He's trying not to let it show, but he's very depressed," Albus said, putting down his quill and joining Minerva at the window. Snow was falling and Hogwarts would see a white Christmas.

"He says he just wants to be left alone, Albus," Minerva replied, "but I don't know as that's best."

Albus put his arm around her and shook his head. "I know that he'd been looking forward to that trip for months, particularly since the goat-lovers only meet every four years now, and he hadn't been able to attend the last gathering because of that nasty case of scrofungulus."

Minerva nodded. "I don't understand the appeal, myself, but it's clearly important to him. What I don't understand is why he's letting the rift with Spiros keep him from attending."

"Because Spiros is organising it and giving the keynote address, not to mention that his wedding is going to be the highlight of the second day."

"He could just not attend those," Minerva said, perplexed.

"You see . . ." Albus hesitated. "I shouldn't tell you this . . . but Aberforth has carried a torch for Althea for some time. I think he feels he missed a chance with her, and now she's marrying Spiros, which rather adds insult to injury."

"Had he ever told her how he felt?" Minerva asked.

"No. I think he was working up to it. He never really told me how he felt," Albus replied. "But I think that Aberforth believes that Spiros knew and that that was why he pursued her in the first place."

"Merely as a way to get at Aberforth? Marry a witch just as a kind of petty revenge? Sounds highly unlikely."

"Perhaps, but that is what Aberforth believes."

Minerva's brow was furrowed. "How long did he 'carry a torch' for her, as you put it?" Since 1948, the World-Wide Wizarding Goat-Lovers' Gathering had only met every four years, after all. It wasn't as though Aberforth had seen her very frequently.

Albus chuckled. "It really isn't funny, I suppose, but probably twenty years."

Minerva blinked. "Twenty years?"

"Yes, at least that. I don't know as he ever would have worked up the courage to try to court her, but as long as she was unmarried, there was always that possibility. I think what bothers him more than her marrying is who it is she is marrying. It doesn't help that he believes that Spiros pursued her because he knew how Aberforth felt about her."

"But he'd never even made himself an option for her!" Minerva exclaimed. "Even if she had any idea how Aberforth felt, was the poor witch supposed to wait another couple decades whilst he worked up the courage to tell her?"

"Of course not. It may not seem reasonable to us, but it helps explain why Aberforth isn't going to his goat-lovers' gathering this year after having looked forward to it for so long. I think he may have gone even though Spiros was organising it if it weren't for the wedding."

"Well, the timing of the wedding does sound suspicious," Minerva said. "Christmastime weddings are nice, and I'm sure that many of their mutual friends are members of the group, but it still seems to me that if Spiros knew how Aberforth felt, this was calculated to hurt him, or at least to keep him from the gathering this year."

"Yes, I think so, too."

"It really is too bad," Minerva sighed. "I hate to think of him all alone on Christmas."

"One bright side to all this," Albus said, pulling her closer.

"What's that?"

"I don't have to check in on his goats and sheep while he's away this year. More time for us." He kissed her temple.

"Hmph." Minerva was not going to bring up the issues that his statement immediately brought to mind. It was Christmas, after all. No sense in ruining it by digging up old issues that were more-or-less settled now. "I think that no matter what Aberforth claims, he shouldn't be alone on Christmas."

"He'd be the first to tell you that he won't be alone, my dear."

Minerva looked up at him with a raised eyebrow.

"His goats and sheep. You know he loves them the way some people love their dogs and cats."

"I know, but we're family. You are, anyway. He doesn't need to be alone and he shouldn't be."

Albus recognised the expression on Minerva's face, and he knew that their Christmas Eve would not be the quiet, romantic occasion that he'd been anticipating.

Aberforth poked his fire. He didn't need to be out there with his four-footed friends. Not on their account, anyway. They were quite content on their own, warm in their large, low-roofed stone shed, but he had felt uncomfortable in his roomy, well-furnished cottage. So he had taken his pot of vegetable stew off the cooker, brought it out to the goat shed, and hung it on an iron hook in the small fireplace. A jab of his wand, and he had a nicely glowing fire. With a warm angora on either side of him and the fire before him, he didn't bother casting any warming charms. He'd have a picnic supper there on a blanket in front of the fire, much as he'd often done before, and when he got sleepy, he'd put out the fire and maybe head back up to the cottage, maybe not.

He didn't need people. Goat lovers. Ha! Why hang about a bunch of goat lovers when you could be with goats? He'd check on the sheep a bit later. They were in the next shed over. The fact that he kept sheep as well as goats was one of the things that he and Spiros had fallen out over. But he loved his sheep. Sweet long faces, big, soft brown eyes. Not as spirited as the goats, perhaps, but they had their own ovine charms.

He scratched the top of Flossie's head and patted Mirabelle's side. They were all the company he needed. They appreciated him.

He Levitated the lid from his vegetable stew and gave it a stir. It would be ready soon.

Minerva stamped her cold feet, trying to warm them up. Albus cast a casual warming charm on her boots, then knocked on the door again, this time, more loudly.

"I don't understand it. He said he'd be home," Albus said, finally trying the door handle.

The door opened easily. A wave of Albus's wand, and a few lamps lit.

"Aberforth!" he called.

"Aberforth?" Minerva called. "It's Albus and Minerva!"

Albus walked around the ground floor of the cottage and returned to Minerva. "The cooker's still warm, but other than that, there's no sign he's eaten a meal recently. He's not in the cottage."

"Maybe he's upstairs in bed?" Minerva suggested.

"If he were, we've made enough noise. He'd have come down. I think we should check the sheds. Perhaps one of the animals required his attention."

Albus closed the door behind them as they stepped out into the cold, windy night. There wasn't as much snow as they had left behind them at the Hogwarts gates, but it was much colder, and Minerva wished she'd worn her warmer hat with the ear flaps, but she had given into vanity.

"*Lumos!*" Albus looked around and saw footprints almost obscured by the wind blowing across them. "Yes, my dear, it appears he walked down to the sheds. We'll probably find him with his goats."

Minerva kept herself from grumbling, either about the cold or the prospect of goats. This had been her idea, after all, and she knew that Albus didn't like the smell of goats any better than she did. She followed him down toward the sheds, letting go of the packages she had been carrying in her arms and letting them follow along on their own.

Albus knocked lightly on the door of the first shed, then pushed it open. "Aberforth?" He smiled. Through an open door, he could see his brother sitting on a blanket on the floor in a small room at the end of the shed, a long-haired goat on either side of him.

Aberforth turned his head, surprise on his face. "Albus?"

"And Minerva!" his brother said.

Minerva stuck her head around the corner. "Merry Christmas, Aberforth!"

Aberforth stood up, brushing off his legs. "Er, wasn't expecting you. Or anybody."

"We came to see in Christmas with you," Albus said, holding up a small picnic hamper. "If you'll have us, of course."

Minerva stepped into the shed, her packages following her. "It's warmer in here."

"Shut the door," Aberforth said gruffly. "You're letting in the wind."

Albus smiled and closed the door behind them. "So, are we invited to stay?"

"Course. It's Christmas Eve," Aberforth replied. "Um, got some stew, if you'd like some. Only one bowl, but we could Transfigure a couple more."

"Lovely," Albus said, coming into the little room. One of the goats stood up and bumped his leg gently...for a goat. Albus chuckled and patted its head briefly. He set his basket down on a bench as Minerva stepped around a goat leaving and entered the room.

"Scuse us," Aberforth said, blushing slightly. He waved his wand, cleaning up the goat droppings.

Minerva smiled at him. She really didn't care for goats, but Aberforth did, and they did have pretty fur or wool, or whatever you called it on goats. "They're lovely animals, Aberforth. They really are. Are they any particular type?"

"These'uns are angoras. Part of your muffler came from these two," Aberforth said, indicating the bright green scarf that Minerva wore around her neck. He'd sent it up to the castle a few days before with a note wishing her a happy Christmastide.

"It's a wonderful scarf," Minerva said warmly. "We brought you a few little presents."

Albus usually spent Boxing Day with Aberforth and had been going to give him his gifts then, but Minerva had insisted on bringing them with them that night.

"And we brought some bread, cheese, nuts, clementines, and a very small but tasty...we hope...Christmas pudding," Albus said, drawing from the basket some of the items he named. "And, of course, some wine for us and some brandy for the pudding."

"I'm sure you brought some crackers with you, too," Minerva said, knowing Albus's love for them. She perched on a stool.

"Of course!" He turned to Aberforth. "Merry Christmas, Brother!"

Aberforth looked embarrassed. He looked around the little room. "You'd be more comfortable up in the cottage, I'm sure. We should move up there." His hand strayed to the back of Flossie, his fingers carding through her long, soft hair.

"Oh, no, we wouldn't think of it, would we, Albus!" Minerva exclaimed, trying to look more comfortable on her three-legged stool. "And what better way to spend Christmas Eve, after all, than with God's creatures."

"Precisely, my dear," Albus said. "Jesus was born in a place much like this, they say. Good enough for him to be born in and the shepherds to visit him, then it's the perfect place for our family Christmas Eve supper."

"And wasn't it shepherds who heard the angels announce his birth?" Minerva asked rhetorically. "Albus and I are in very good company, indeed!"

The three settled down and ate bread, cheese, and vegetable stew, following it up with a flaming Christmas pudding and nibbles of nuts and oranges. They pulled crackers, put paper crowns on their four-footed companions, and sang carols until after midnight. Albus read "A Child's Christmas in Wales," bringing tears to Aberforth's eyes, which he steadfastly refused to acknowledge, just saying something about "a bit of straw in his eye."

When they finally left Aberforth at the door to his cottage, each giving him a hug and Minerva giving him a kiss on the cheek, it was after two in the morning. They arrived at the Hogwarts gates, where it was snowing again, and Albus turned to Minerva.

"You were right, my dear. This was one of the nicest Christmas Eves I can remember."

"I knew you'd be happy once we did it," Minerva replied, looking up at him with a warm smile.

He kissed her lips softly. "Christmas breakfast will be here all too soon, or I would suggest that we continue our celebration in the Headmaster's suite."

Minerva quirked a grin. "We can always take a nap tomorrow. I'm in a celebratory mood, Albus."

"Then let's get in and warm ourselves up, hmm, my dear?" he suggested with a wink as he took her arm.

"Happy Christmas, Albus."

"A very happy Christmas, indeed."

~Fin~

Note: The goat in the banner is an angora, just like Flossie and Mirabelle!

Anyone interested in the "true" story of Aberforth and the inappropriate charms, it is retold in the eleventh chapter of *A Holiday with the Headmaster*.