

# Traditional Socks

*by Angharad*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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### Traditional Socks

"No Albus, I simply cannot give socks to Hagrid for Christmas!" Professor Minerva McGonagall and Professor Albus Dumbledore were standing in Gladrags Wizardwear on a snowy December morning. Minerva was holding what had to be the largest pair of gloves ever created. Made of thick wool with alternating crimson, blue, yellow, and green stripes, they were an exact match to the enormous pair of socks in Albus' hands.

"Why?" Albus asked reasonably, "I happen to know that he always needs socks."

"He also needs gloves," Minerva responded crisply, "he gave his warmest pair to a mother kneazle and her kittens."

Albus nodded. "That is why I was planning on giving him gloves," he told her, "the ones you're holding, in fact."

"Can't you give him the socks instead?" Minerva implored.

"Of course I can," Albus replied, "but I fail to understand why this agitates you so." He looked at her expectantly.

Minerva stared at him. "Surely I've told you about my family tradition?" Albus shook his head.

"Well," Minerva sighed, "my great-grandmother had six suitors, all quite ardent and earnest, but she couldn't decide which one she really wanted. In order to narrow the field, so to speak, she knitted a pair of socks, wrapped them, then enchanted the wrapping paper so that it could only be seen by the one who loved her."

"Ingenious," Albus smiled his approval. "How many of them saw it?"

"None," Minerva replied. "Her best friend was the one who saw the package." She grinned at Albus' confusion. "Apparently, he had been in love with her for quite a while, but didn't think he stood a chance against the other six."

"What happened?" Albus wanted to know.

"She married him, of course," Minerva replied matter-of-factly. "He never wore the socks though," she continued. "He had them framed and hung over the mantelpiece in his study, as a reminder to always speak his mind."

Albus laughed. "I cannot believe you never told me this before now."

"I haven't finished," Minerva informed him. "Now, my grandmother, on the other hand, knew exactly which man she wanted, but had no idea how he felt. She sent him a pair of socks, asking him to wear them if he loved her, or send them back if he didn't."

"And...?" Albus prompted her.

"He wore them all right," Minerva went on, "and shortened his robes so that she would be sure to notice."

"Did your mother continue this tradition?" Albus queried, grinning broadly.

Minerva nodded. "My father knew all about the socks," she said, "So, his way of proposing to my mother was to ask her if she'd knit him a pair."

"Very sensible," was Albus' response.

"Now do you understand why I cannot give socks to Hagrid?" Minerva asked.

"Absolutely," Albus nodded. "We can't have him getting ideas, can we?"

Minerva wisely ignored that remark, and the two of them silently made their purchases. As they strolled companionably, arm in arm, back to Hogwarts, Albus had a question. "If you were to present some fortunate man with a pair of socks, what color would you choose?"

"His favorite, if he had one," Minerva answered quietly, suddenly finding her shoes quite fascinating.

"Emerald green would be best," Albus turned his head to look at her. "Any man who loves you would appreciate that color." They walked the rest of the way to the castle in silence, absorbed in their own thoughts. However, a careful observer would have noted a faint flush on Minerva's cheeks that had nothing to do with the weather.

Albus stole a glance at the woman beside him and marveled, once again, at how it was possible to know someone for decades yet still be surprised. The two of them had been the closest of friends for many years, but this was the first time Minerva had spoken of such a tradition. Knowing what he did of her romantic history, he wondered if she'd knitted socks for either of the men who broke her heart, or if they had shown their true colors before things had progressed that far. *More the fools they*, he thought grimly. Would she risk her heart a third time? *Would she risk it for me?*

It was about a year ago, in weather very much like this, when Albus fell in love with Minerva or, perhaps more accurately, realized he was in love with her. He had been standing in front of the Hogshead, talking with his brother, Aberforth, when Aberforth began to watch something over Albus' shoulder. So intent was he that Albus turned around, but could see no one but Minerva. Puzzled, he looked back at Aberforth, who grunted, "You're probably used to it by now," the expression on his face was one of frank admiration, "but that Professor McGonagall is something." Not exactly sure what his brother meant, Albus turned around again, but this time he took a good look at his deputy.

Albus had always considered Minerva attractive, and often wondered just how long her hair really was, but these observations had been on the intellectual level. Now it was as if he were seeing her for the first time, and his appreciation was far from intellectual. He found himself itching to release her hair from its confines and run his fingers through it, to touch her pale cheeks, made rosy from the cold, and to kiss the lips that quirked into a small smile as she greeted a passing witch in the street. *How is it that I have known her this long, and yet never seen how radiant she is?*

This new physical awareness, combined with Albus' already deep affection for Minerva, resulted in a rush of emotions so sudden, so intense, and *saïght*, that he wondered if these feelings had been below the surface all the time, waiting for him to notice them. "You're right Aberforth, she is something," he replied. "However, I do not think I will ever be 'used to it' again." With that, Albus took leave of his brother, and crossed the street to meet Minerva. He neither saw Aberforth's knowing smile, nor heard him mutter "Well, it's about time!"

Since that day, Albus had quietly and subtly began to court Minerva. Their strolls around the lake became more frequent, as did his impromptu visits between classes. At Ministry events, and the obligatory School Governor functions, he was especially attentive, rarely leaving her side. While she was very pleased by and grateful for his attention, it was obvious that she didn't read anything more into his actions than friendship. This hardly surprised him, though. Minerva was justifiably confident in her abilities and her intellect, but her previous affairs had destroyed any confidence she'd had in herself as a woman. Knowing this, Albus had racked his brain for a way to make his intentions crystal clear without frightening her, driving her away, or destroying their friendship. It was a daunting task, and he was beginning to think it would prove impossible, until he learned of Minerva's family tradition.

Christmas came and went, the Mirror of Erised was safely moved, and a troubled boy was advised that "It does not do to dwell on dreams, and forget to live." Albus decided that one old man would do well to follow his own advice, and it was with this thought in mind that, at breakfast the next morning, he turned to Minerva and asked, "Did you get everything your heart desired for Christmas this year?"

"Does anyone?" came her wary reply.

"Some, I suppose," he mused. "I was hoping for a pair of socks but, alas, received none."

"There are twelve days of Christmas," Minerva reminded him after a slight pause, "and owls are blown off course from time to time."

"That's quite true," he nodded. "I shall remain hopeful, at least until Twelfth Night."

Albus spent the remainder of that day at the Ministry of Magic listening to Cornelius Fudge wax imbecilic in meeting after meeting, trying to direct the Minister without appearing to do so, and offering sage advice when called upon. By the time he arrived back at Hogwarts he was completely drained, barely getting into his pajamas before falling into bed. His last thought, before succumbing to slumber, was that at least a day at the Ministry meant an early morning meeting with Minerva.

Early morning duly arrived and, as Albus rubbed the sleep from his eyes, he spotted a small package at the foot of the bed. Grinning like a small boy on Christmas day, he reached for the parcel, to which was attached a piece of rolled parchment. Breaking the seal, he read the following:

*Dear Albus,*

*Please forgive the tardiness of this gift. The owl delivering the yarn really was blown off course, I haven't knitted since I was about 12-years-old and, quite frankly, I've been more than a little nervous about the whole thing.*

*I am not entirely certain when I actually fell in love with you, but I do know that I realized how I felt a little over a year ago. You were crossing the street in front of the Hogshead to meet me, and I will never forget the look on your face. For a few moments, I thought you were going to kiss me, but then you shivered a bit, smiled, and took my arm instead. I was more than a little disappointed, and more than a little puzzled as to why I would feel that way in the first place. Since that day, there have been times when I thought I saw that look on your face again, but I always attributed it to wishful thinking on my part. Now, after what you said yesterday morning and during our Christmas shopping excursion to Hogsmeade, I'm not so sure. You know me better than anyone, and I cannot imagine that you would joke about something like this, not after what you know I've been through. On the other hand, your sense of humor sometimes eludes me and, I will admit, more than one person has found my family tradition to be a tad eccentric.*

*Thus, I am "calling your bluff", as it were. As you may have surmised, this package contains a pair of socks. What color they are will depend on you - in fact you gave me the idea. If you love me, the socks will be emerald green; if you do not, they will be purple. All you have to do is think of me when you touch them. I will see you very soon but, until then, know that I am thinking of you.*

*All my love,*

*Minerva*

Albus carefully unwrapped the package. His fingers touched something soft and warm that shimmered, like the fabric of an invisibility cloak. For a moment, all the colors of the rainbow flashed before coalescing into one.

Minerva McGonagall was, quite simply, a nervous wreck. After giving Albus' parcel to a house elf, with strict instructions on where it should be placed and when, she had gone to bed. Sleep, however, proved elusive as her thoughts kept returning to Albus and all his possible reactions to the gift. Finally, at around five in the morning, she gave up trying to sleep altogether. A long warm bath restored her equilibrium somewhat, but the respite was short-lived, as the elf who brought her tea was the same one who, with great glee, assured her that she had, indeed, placed the package just where Professor McGonagall wanted it. This set Minerva's thoughts spinning again, and she had actually begun to pace, something she never did, when she was interrupted by the sound of knocking. Not expecting Albus for another hour, she was thus quite unprepared for the sight that greeted her when she opened the door.

There stood Albus Dumbledore in a nightcap, nightshirt, wooly bathrobe, and slippers all the same shade of emerald green as his brand new socks! Relief and joy flooded Minerva in equal measure, and she didn't know whether to laugh, cry, or just throw herself into his arms. Albus took the matter out of her hands by reaching out to gently caress her face with his. "I did want to kiss you that day a year ago, and every day since," he confessed. "But, each time, I lost my nerve. Will you ever forgive me?"

"Only if you kiss me right now," Minerva responded in a voice that was only slightly above a whisper, as she wound her arms around his neck.

The kiss was very light and soft at first, as each of them took the time to savor the feel of the other. It didn't take long, however, for a year of pent-up passion to bubble to the surface. By the time the kiss finally ended, they were both gasping for air, their slightly swollen lips curved into very happy smiles.

"Thank you," Minerva murmured breathlessly.

"For what?" Albus asked gently.

"For giving me my heart's desire for Christmas," Minerva replied, drawing him to her for another kiss.