

Double Date

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"I still don't understand; why is it just the four of us?" Albus asked, frowning lightly as he knocked several robes off their hangars, trying to find the robes Aberforth described.

"Because you're my brother and Minerva is Poppy's best friend. Simple. No, Albus, the blue ones. Do they look blue to you?"

"Well, they're blue-ish, I suppose ... I still don't get why it's just the four of us."

"We just thought a quiet affair would be nicer, that's all."

"Yes, but - damn." Albus sucked on his finger. "Whose bright idea was it to put them away still with the pins in?"

"Yours. You gave them to me."

At the same time, Minerva was helping Poppy pick out her own robes.

"Pops, you've been married to him for a whole year. It doesn't matter what you wear; he likes you as you are."

"I know, but I still care about how I look on my anniversary," Poppy moaned. "Do you think the red ones are better?"

Minerva surveyed them critically. "I think they're a bit too bright. You know the Dumbledore genes: Albus and Aberforth are both likely to be wearing something outrageously garish. I'd choose something dark if I were you."

"What about you? What robes are you going to wear?" Poppy asked, replacing the scarlet robes in the wardrobe.

"I'm not going to be wearing robes."

Poppy's eyebrows shot up. "I absolutely forbid you to turn up to my anniversary dinner naked."

"Don't be ridiculous! Of course I won't be naked! I just said I won't be wearing robes."

"What will you be wearing then?"

Minerva smiled mysteriously. "Oh, you'll see later."

Due to her new teaching job, Minerva had had little opportunity to get out of the castle, and was determined to make the most of it tonight – even if the dress was a little inappropriate for the occasion. It was, after all, Poppy’s anniversary, not hers.

Poppy just shook her head at her and turned back to the wardrobe. She pulled out the last hanger.

Minerva gasped. “Poppy! They’re perfect!”

Her friend agreed, grinning. “I’d forgotten I had them. I haven’t even worn them yet. Hope they still fit.” She held up the robes to the light. They were made of a fine silk in a deep ruby red, so dark they seemed almost black in poor light. Minerva’s fears of out-dressing her friend were instantly killed.

“Try them on. I want to see -”

Poppy hastily stuffed the robes out of sight as there was a knock on the door. “Come in.”

Aberforth’s grinning head appeared round the door. “Hello, ladies. All ready for the big occasion?”

“You make it sound like we’re going to a big party, not a private dinner,” Minerva remarked.

Poppy shot her a glare, and Minerva rolled her eyes. “Fine, I’ll leave you two alone. Just don’t lose track of time, the table’s booked for eight o’clock.” She dodged Poppy’s swipe at her head and left the room, closing the door behind her.

Aberforth pulled Poppy into a hug and placed a gentle kiss on her lips. “Well? How’s it going?”

“Brilliant. They don’t suspect a thing.”

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As evening ticked nearer, all four of the party anticipated the evening with mixed feelings. Poppy and Aberforth, naturally, were sickeningly happy, and exited. Albus was nervous about spending an evening with three others – he knew it would feel like he and Minerva were expected to be like a ‘couple’. Although he didn’t mind, he worried how Minerva would take it.

Said witch was having doubts about her choice of attire. She feared it would give the wrong impression, and she also was worried about spending the evening in the company of Albus and the other two. It could end up being extremely awkward.

She sighed and surveyed herself in the mirror, still wondering if she should take out some of her robes. She'd seen the dress in a Muggle shop, funnily enough, and had bought it as a joke to herself with the idea that it would surely impress Albus into confessing his undying love for her. She'd never expected anything of the sort to happen, but every now and again she'd taken it out of the wardrobe and pictured him saying all the things she wished to hear from his mouth.

Too bad it would never happen.

The dress was black, long and off-the-shoulder. Minerva had for once let her hair down and brushed it out fully so it fell to her waist. Looking in the mirror, she knew it was far beyond what she would normally wear on special occasions – she'd only ever dressed up this much for Poppy and Aberforth's wedding, and then it had been Pomona who'd picked out the maid of honour's dress, saying that Minerva wouldn't choose anything special enough. Minerva had been mortally offended, but agreed she had a point.

Turning on the spot to see how the dress moved with her, Minerva sighed. It would have to do – it was getting late, and she didn't have time to go through her wardrobe again. She spritzed her wrists slightly with perfume and deemed herself as ready as she would ever be.

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After nearly an hour of debate, and added consultation with Aberforth, Albus had finally picked out a set of light blue robes for the occasion. Minerva had always said they were her favourite: apparently they brought out the colour of his eyes. He'd arranged to meet with Minerva and walk down the grounds with her. Checking his watch, he realised he'd run late, and arrived outside her rooms slightly out of breath.

Minerva answered the door as soon as he knocked, and before he could apologise for being late, the words got lost on the way to his mouth.

She looked absolutely stunning. The dress accented beautifully her natural curves and flowed out more down the legs, leaving plenty of room for her to move. Her hair fell in loose waves and glimmered in the light, making him long to reach out and stroke it. The contrast between her pale complexion and the rich blackness of her hair and dress made her sparkling emerald eyes stand out even more than usual. Albus took one look into them and was lost to the world.

It was a couple of minutes before he realised that Minerva was waving a hand in front of his face. "Hello, Albus? Earth to Albus?"

He pulled himself together with difficulty.

"S-sorry," he stammered, mentally kicking himself for it. "I – I just –" He swallowed. "Wow, Minerva, you ... you look beautiful."

She seemed slightly taken aback, but smiled in response. "Well, if that's your reaction, I don't like to think how long it would take to bring back someone who was really attracted to me." She picked up her bag and shut the door behind her. "Shall we go, then? We don't want to keep the lovebirds waiting."

It took a moment for Albus to register what she'd said, and was hurt that she seemed to think he couldn't be attracted to her. But he shook it off quickly and offered her his arm, which she took.

It was a wonderfully warm, still summer's evening, and the two were strangely quiet as they strolled across the grounds to the edge of the anti-apparition wards. Anyone looking out of the castle windows would have thought they were a couple. The stars were just beginning to come out, and the fading light cast shadows across the ground.

Minerva leaned on Albus' arm as they walked. The only sounds that could be heard in the air were crickets and the occasional owl. It was so peaceful Albus was almost reluctant to reach their destination.

"Strange, isn't it?" Minerva murmured as the gates came into sight.

"What's strange?"

"Poppy and Aberforth. The year's gone so quickly. It seems only yesterday you told me he was proposing, and now ... their first anniversary. Time has flown."

Albus nodded. "Tempus fugit."

She punched him lightly on the arm. "Save the showing-off for the students."

He grinned down at her as they reached the edge of the wards.

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Poppy and Aberforth had chosen a small wizarding restaurant in London for the celebratory dinner. As well as excellent food and service, it was also very romantic. Albus and Minerva had yet to see the place inside, but had been assured they'd like it. Poppy and Aberforth had bargained on the other two being slightly late, and were successful. When Albus Apparated him and Minerva to the alley round the back of the restaurant, their plan had already been put in place.

"Sorry we're late," Albus started to apologise, but Aberforth waved it off. "It doesn't matter, we only got here just before you," he lied. "Shall we go in, then?"

"Wow," Minerva commented as they entered. "It's lovely."

Albus had to agree. Red roses were in vases on every table, and candles were lit around the walls, which were creamy-white and went beautifully with the ebony furniture and

dark red upholstery. Classical music was playing quietly. He and Minerva looked at each other. This could be very awkward.

"We booked a table," Poppy said, leading the other three through the room to a more private one. "Here." She pointed to a 'Reserved' sign on the table in the corner – the only one in the restaurant that seemed to be set for four.

"How did you book?" Minerva asked curiously as the four of them sat down.

"Aberforth mastered the phone specially," Poppy replied, looking adoringly over at her husband who grinned back. Minerva and Albus glanced at each other, trying not to laugh.

A waiter appeared. "May I take your order?"

Albus caught Minerva's eye again as he browsed the menu. A hair had got in her eye and it was watering as she tried to brush it out.

"Here," he said, leaning across and brushed it out for her.

"Thank you," she said, wiping her eye.

The waiter, who'd just been writing down Poppy's order, looked at the two of them.

"Are you two the happy couple?"

"What?" Albus hastily withdrew his arm, nearly knocking the rose vase over, as Minerva said firmly, "No."

"Oh, sorry. My mistake," the waiter said, going pink and hurriedly moved on to write down Aberforth's order. Neither Minerva nor Albus saw Poppy's smirk.

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"... And then the whole thing exploded!"

Minerva, who'd just taken a sip of her wine, choked and Albus offered her a bang on the back which she accepted, just as the waiter appeared with two plates. He gave them a funny look as he deposited them on the table in front of them. "One lasagne and mixed vegetables, and one baked potato and salmon with side salad."

"Thank you," Albus said, as Minerva took the offered water. "It looks delicious."

The waiter smiled and turned to Aberforth. "I'm sorry sir, but there's a problem with your order. Could you come to the bar?"

"I'll go," Albus offered, beginning to stand up, but Aberforth laid a hand on his arm.

"No need Albus, I can handle it. I'll see you two in a minute."

"This way, sir," the waiter led Aberforth out of the private room. After a moment Poppy said, "I'll go too," and slid out of her seat.

"Poppy, you don't need to follow him," Minerva said in amusement.

"Actually I think I do. Goodness knows what a mess Aby would make of things if he had to sort it out on his own."

"She has a point," Albus said to Minerva, his eyes twinkling. Poppy smiled and went after her husband and the waiter.

"Well," Minerva said after a moment of silence, "there's no point letting the food go cold, I suppose."

"You took the words right out of my mouth, my dear," Albus smiled at her and picked up his knife and fork.

Minerva sat in silence for a moment, trying to work out what was bugging her. Finally she said, "Did you notice Aberforth said 'I'll see you two in a minute'?"

Albus shrugged. "Maybe ... maybe it was a mistake. Or, maybe he knew Poppy would come after him."

Minerva chewed her lip. "Maybe." Remembering her salmon, she cut a piece and chewed it thoughtfully.

"Nice?" Albus said quizzically.

She nodded and swallowed. "Very."

A smile hinted at the corners of his mouth as he watched her eat, and finally she put down her knife and fork and addressed him directly. "Care to tell me what you find so amusing, Albus?"

He looked down at his plate. "Oh, nothing ..."

"No, tell me."

Albus' face split into a grin. "It's just, this is the first time I've seen you eat fish since you became an Animagus."

Minerva opened her mouth, closed it, opened it again, couldn't think of a suitable retort, and suddenly dissolved into giggles. Albus seemed relieved.

"Something funny?" he asked, his eyes twinkling.

“Ha, ha.” Minerva took a sip of water. “You’re lucky I’m in such an amiable mood tonight, Albus. The next time you make a comment like that you may find yourself on the receiving end of a Bat-Bogey Hex.”

“I wouldn’t have expected anything less from you, my dear,” Albus replied, turning back to his dinner. It was lucky he did, because a faint blush crept over Minerva’s face as she realised this was the second time he had called her ‘my dear’ ... not to mention both times were over dinner in a restaurant that was obviously meant for romantic couples.

After a few more moments of compatible silence, Albus said, “That clock’s annoying me.”

Minerva turned in her seat to look. “Why?”

“It looks too much like my old one,” Albus replied.

Minerva frowned. “The one you had when you were little? I remember Aberforth mentioning something about that.”

“He would,” Albus muttered.

“What happened?”

Albus grimaced and began the tale of how a five-year-old Aberforth had stolen the clock in his brother’s room and somehow bewitched it so that it shot jets of acidic potion at regular intervals ... but not when anyone was in the room. It had taken a month of Albus’ carpet and bed sheets repeatedly having holes burned in them before the family put it down to the clock. As Albus told the tale, he slowly stopped sulking and was able to laugh at it.

As the two of them laughed together, Aberforth, Poppy and the anniversary celebration completely forgotten, neither Albus nor Minerva saw the waiter from earlier watch from a crack in the door, a smile on his lips.

~*~@*~

“May I take your plates?”

It wasn’t till the waiter appeared again that Albus and Minerva noticed something was wrong.

“What happened to Poppy and Aberforth?”

Minerva turned to ask the waiter, but he was backing hurriedly out of the room. Slowly she turned back to the table.

“Something’s fishy.”

"The salmon?" Albus suggested. "Maybe you should clean your teeth -"

Minerva threw her napkin at him. "Don't be stupid Albus, you know what I mean. I smell a rat. A large rat that has 'set-up' written all over it."

Comprehension dawned on Albus' face. "You think we should have a look in the front room, Minerva?"

"Definitely." They both pushed their chairs back and left the table.

~*@*~

"Your dessert, sir and madam."

"Thank you," Poppy said, moving her arm out of the way of the sponge pudding.

"I think I ought to warn you," the waiter said, placing Aberforth's spotted dick in his place, "the other couple seem to have guessed your plan."

Poppy laughed. "Took them long enough."

"Ahem."

Poppy, Aberforth and the waiter turned round sharply to see an amused-looking Albus and thunderous-looking Minerva standing in the doorway.

"Um," Aberforth said hesitantly, "how was your dinner?"

~*@*~

"That is the last time," Minerva said firmly, "I am going anywhere with you two."

"Oh come on Min, be fair," Poppy said, hurrying to keep up.

"Don't call me that."

"Look, it was a harmless bit of fun, all right? Don't be cross."

"Give her time," Albus said audibly. "She'll come round in a couple of days."

"Albus Dumbledore, don't talk about me like that as if I'm not here!"

"Pops," Aberforth said gently, taking her arm, "Albus is right, leave her be. We've got plans now, anyway."

Poppy sighed. Minerva was standing several feet away, watching the other three with her arms folded.

"Alright. See you later, you two."

"Where are you going?" Albus called after them as they paused outside the restaurant entrance.

"Pudding, then the night in a fancy hotel." Aberforth winked. "Night, Albus, Minerva."

Albus bade them goodnight and turned back to Minerva. She was still standing in the same position, only she was determinedly not looking at him.

"Tabby?" he asked hesitantly.

Minerva merely squared her shoulders, though the fact that he'd got some reaction cheered Albus slightly. He walked over and touched her bare shoulder. "Shall we go back to Hogwarts?"

She sighed. "Okay."

"You're freezing! Didn't you bring a coat or anything?"

Minerva shook her head. Albus took her arm and Apparated them to just outside the Hogwarts boundaries, and they began to walk up slowly in silence. After a couple of minutes watching her shiver, Albus put his arm round her shoulders. She froze up for a moment, but then relaxed into his hold, and they grew closer to one another as their journey progressed.

Albus let them inside and began to walk Minerva back to her rooms, finally breaking the silence. "I know I mentioned this before Minerva, but I wanted to say it without sounding like a stammering idiot ... you really do look beautiful tonight."

Minerva smiled in spite of herself. "Thank you, Albus."

He stopped and she almost walked into him. for a moment she wondered why, then saw - they were outside her rooms.

"Well, goodnight," Albus said quietly, and began to turn away.

"Albus - wait."

He turned back.

Minerva sighed. "Sorry I was being so ... difficult earlier. It's just, this is not the first time something similar has happened, and ... Well, I'm sorry."

He smiled. "That's all right."

"And, I wanted to say ... despite what Poppy and your brother did, I really enjoyed tonight. It was wonderful."

It wasn't till he was barely inches away from her face than she realised he had been drawing closer as she spoke.

"Wonderful enough for this?" he murmured questioningly, as if asking permission. Minerva granted it with a small nod, and he leaned in and kissed her gently.

As they broke apart a few moments later, Minerva said, "I'm still going to kill those two, though."

FIN

****Author's Notes:** I appreciate feedback. No flames please