

# Mismatched Socks



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*It's called being human. – Renée Moons*





## Mismatched Socks

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***Sophia***

# 1 Vincent van Gogh

♪ Sunflower – Tamino, Angèle ♪

The first thing I noticed about her were her mismatched socks and her lack of fashion that make her who she is. At first, I thought she couldn't find the other sock that matched the first, or that she was in a hurry that morning and didn't have any time to find the right socks. Oh no, that was not it.

She mismatched her socks on purpose. Every day since I noticed her, I only saw the different socks. Maybe she thinks it brings good luck or has some sentimental reason for it. I wanted to ask her yesterday, but I was too shy. Maybe it would be weird for me to notice some stranger's socks?

Together with her mismatched socks, her blonde curly hair and lack of fashion, she walks in the library. She looks in my direction and I look down at my book immediately. Did she see me? I hope not. I write down some things for research and close the book.

I put my books and pencil case in my backpack. I take the heavy book about the French Revolution and walk to the shelve where it belongs. I put it back and read the titles of the other books, maybe there is something interesting.

'Uhm, excuse me? Could you help me please?' And there she stands. Her curls bouncing while she nervously laughs, her woollen sweater seams very comfy, her jeans are a little bit too short, her colourful socks and her white trainers.

She frowns. 'Uhm, if you can't, you can just say so', she says in an accent that is not British. 'I'm sorry, yes I can help you', I say flustered and look away. My cheeks are definitely turned red. 'Great! I cannot find the book about *Vincent van Gogh*. It should be somewhere between the art and the history section, but I simply cannot find it.'

I walk with her to the shelf where it should be on, but the book is nowhere to be found. 'Oh, well, then someone else will have it', she shrugs. 'We could ask the librarian who has it?' I suggest.

'No, it is fine, I'll come back tomorrow. Thank you for helping me', she turns to leave.

'Wait!' That was a little too loud.

'Yes?' She raises her eyebrow.

'What's your name?'

'Renée. Yours?'

'Sophia.'

'Nice to meet you.'

She leaves the library. 'Renée', I repeat in a whisper with a soft smile. Well, I am sure of one thing, she is not from England or anywhere from the UK. And the way she pronounced Vincent van Gogh. Maybe she's from Germany, it would also explain her accent. When I return to my dorm, my roommate Elise is lying on her bed.

'Everything all right?' I ask.

'I am exhausted', she says. 'And I can't believe this year is only one month in', she continues.

'I understand you completely.' I smile big.

'What are you smiling about?' Elise tilts her head.

'I'm not smiling.' I shyly look away.

'You totally are.' There is a silence while she looks at me, questioning.

'Her name is Renée', I exclaim.

'OMG did you finally talk to her?!' Elise is surprised and stands to hug me.

'Well, she talked to me actually.'

'What did she say?! Did she ask you out?'

'No, she couldn't find a book and I helped her search for it.'

'And?' Elise asks.

'We couldn't find it.'

'That's it?'

'That's it.'

Elise facepalms herself. 'You are a total idiot. You should've asked her out. Or just invited her for a coffee or tea.'

'She was already gone before I could ask.'

Elise sighs. 'Well, she said about going back to the library tomorrow to look if the book was there then.'

'Great! You should be there and ask her out!' Elise says excited with her hands in the air.

'But what if she is not into girls?'

'Then you would've made a new friend, that's not that bad either.'



The next day I am sitting in the library. Elise is here somewhere too, she wanted to support me. She's just curious and wants to see how it goes. I play with a lock of my hair, waiting for *her*. 'She is not coming', I whisper to Elise when an hour passes. 'Maybe she's in a class or is studying or hanging out with friends?' The big wooden door opens, and *she* walks in. She puts the tote bag on her shoulder and walks past my table. Elise signs me to follow her, so that is what I do.

Renée comes to a stop before the shelves we looked at yesterday. '*Aha, gevonden*<sup>1</sup>', she says in her native language. 'Hi', I say. She turns around in surprise. 'Oh, hello.'

'Did you find the book?'

'Yes', she smiles, holding up the book.

'So what language was that?' I am curious.

'Oh, Flemish. I am from Belgium', she says with a shy smile.

'Oh wow, I wouldn't have guessed.' I chuckle.

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<sup>1</sup> '*Aha, found it.*'

'Haha, it must've sound weird. People always tell me it sounds weird.' I want to say no, but I would be lying. 'Yes, it sounds a little weird.' Renée smiles softly.

'Well, I should go. Professor Wilson won't be happy if I turn in my paper too late.' She takes a step back. Did I say something wrong? 'See you, Sophia', she says and walks away. Well, she remembered my name. 'Would you like a cup of tea some time?' I almost shout through the whole library.

Renée looks at me over her shoulder. 'Sounds good. My dorm is in the Victoria building, room 513.' My heart could explode from the little smile she gave me. 'Congratulations', Elise says with a proud smile.

'Thanks.'

'But next time, you shouldn't yell through the whole building', she laughs.

'Oh, shut your mouth.'



The next day I walk with two teas-to-go to Renée's building. When I find her room, I knock on the door. 'Door's open', a male voice says. I open the door a little and see a young man - around my age - sitting on one of the beds. 'Am I in the wrong room or building?' I ask.

'Depends on where you need to be', he says.

'Victoria building room 513.'

'Then you are where you need to be.' He looks me up and down. 'Gladys is not here.' The young man breaks the awkward silence.

'I don't know Gladys.' I nervously look at the cups in my hands.

'Oh, are you a friend of Renée?' He sounds surprised.

'Not really.' I feel small, not really knowing what to say or do.

'Then what are you doing here?' He stands up.

'Colin, don't intimidate people you don't know', a voice says behind me. 'Well, she is the one standing in your doorstep with two cups of tea', Colin defends himself. Renée walks past me with a towel in her hair and puts down her shampoo. 'Sophia, come in and ignore what this bastard has to say', Renée says and throws a pillow towards Colin.

'Maybe I should go, I didn't know you had company', I say and put down the tea on a desk.

'No, stay. Colin is leaving.' Renée gives her friend - or maybe boyfriend - a death stare.

'Fine', Colin says and walks past me.

'So, don't mind the towel. I just came out of the shower and my curls are like teenagers. They do whatever they want unless you lock them up', she laughs a little. I laugh too.

'I hope Colin was a little bit nice', she says with a frown.

'Intimidating.'

'He really should learn how to behave around people he doesn't know. He scares everyone away.' She takes a cup of tea from the cupholder. 'Thanks', she mutters and takes a sip.

'He didn't scare you away.' I look at her over my cup, taking a sip from my tea. 'Well, if you know each other since the day you were born, it is quite impossible.'

'Oh.'

Renée laughs. 'He's not as bad as he seems. Believe me, he is a real softie.' I smile at her. 'So, how much for the tea?'

'Oh nothing, my treat.'

'Well, I should talk to people more than if they all would buy me a cup of tea', she smiles and sits on her bed. 'You can sit too', she says and makes a gesture. I consider sitting next to her for a minute, but that may be too weird. I sit on her roommate's bed.

'So, what classes do you take?' I ask.



'Art and Biology.' She looks at her two different socks. 'You?'  
'History and Creative Writing', I answer with a shy smile,  
but still surprised from her answer.

'Given your facial expression you are surprised that I take  
Biology.'

'I thought you would do acting or something like that', I say  
and look away at my shoes.

She laughs. 'Everyone thinks that.' We both laugh. 'I am  
awfully bad at acting, I can't even lie without laughing.'

'Well, you seem an open person.'

'I'll take that as a compliment.'

Renée's phone chimes and she looks at the screen, rolling  
her eyes. 'Colin, just come in', she says, and the door opens. 'I  
brought snacks.' Colin smiles and tosses a small bag of crisps at  
Renée.

'Just admit you're lonely without me.' Renée chuckles.

'I am too manly for that.' Colin gives me a small bag of crisps  
too. 'Thank you', I say and accept the crisps as a peace offering.  
Colin sits next to Renée.

'Aren't you going to introduce me?' he asks.

'Colin, Sophia. Sophia, Colin.' He gives me a small smile.

'How did you two meet?'

'I couldn't find the book about Vincent van Gogh I needed  
for Wilson's paper, and I asked her to help me find it', Renée says.

'Did you find it?'

'No', Renée and I say. Colin chuckles.

'I did find it yesterday', Renée says. There is a long silence,  
like I shouldn't be here. Colin pokes the towel on Renée's head.  
'Ugh', she sighs and takes the towel off. Her damp curls fall onto her  
shoulders. It's beautiful.

'So, Sophia, what year are you in?' Colin asks.

'Second.'

'Oh well, we're lucky Ren. A second year wants to hang out  
with us first years.' Colin sounds surprised.

'You're just lucky anyone wants to talk to you.' Renée stands up to hang the towel over the radiator.

'I didn't know you were wearing your sassy trousers today', Colin says coldly.

'Because I'm trying to make a new friend and you just invited yourself.' Renée sounds pissed.

'You said come in', Colin defends himself.

'Because you are my best friend, and I was being polite because you don't have any other friends here.'

'You don't either.'

'I'm trying.' Renée points at me.

'Maybe I should go', I say and take my handbag.

'No! No, you should stay. I'll leave.' Colin stands up.

'Thanks for the crisps', I say before he disappears.

'You're welcome.'

'I'm sorry', Renée says and grabs her blanket like she is going to hug it. 'Don't be.' I almost standing up to give her a hug. 'It's just... I only have him, and his other friends are older and have their lives, so he only has me. He's my best friend, really. But I want to make other friends, new friends and he is just so intimidating sometimes and scares them away. And it makes me angry.'

'You don't have to explain.' I smile softly at her.

'Thanks', she says with a little smile.

'So how come you are best friends with an Englishman but not English yourself?'

'Haha, that's complicated, but I will explain', she says, wrapping the blanket around her shoulders. 'My father is Belgian and my mother English, but my parents both speak French and my father also Flemish - which I speak mostly because of school. Colin's mother and my mother went to the same University and became best friends and eventually our fathers too.'

'After I graduated secondary school, we moved to England. Now Colin and I are neighbours.' 'That doesn't explain how you two know each other so well', I say with a frown. She laughs. 'We just

knew each other and called and texted when we didn't see each other. But in the holidays my family would always come here', she says.

'So, what about you?'

'My father is English and my mother Italian.'

'Oh cool! Can you also speak Italian?'

I am overwhelmed by her enthusiasm. 'A little', I say with a shy smile. 'I've always wanted to go to Italy. I have been there when I was little, but my sister kept pushing me in the pool. So I want to go there and make memories.' She smiles, probably thinking how it would be.

'I'll take you someday', I blurt out. She looks at me in surprise. I want to dig a hole in the ground and bury myself.

'That would be cool someday.' She nods slowly, her smile disappearing a little by the surprise.

I can sense the awkwardness. 'I should really go now, my roommate is probably wondering where I am.' I stand up. 'Oh, okay.' Renée sounds a little disappointed. 'I'll see you later', I say and leave her room. You idiot, idiot, idiot.

*Renée*

## 2 Lesbi honest

♪ *midnight love – girl in red* ♪

A week has passed since Sophia visited me in my dorm. She is avoiding me. Whenever I see her - in the library, the hallways or in the cafeteria - she walks away. For a moment I thought that maybe I made a new friend. Turns out I haven't. I blame Colin. I know it's not his fault, but it is easier to blame someone else.

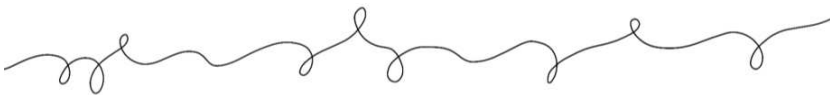
Gladys leaves the room, probably off to her boyfriend where she spends every night. I lay on my bed and stare at the ceiling. Colin is in a class, and I probably should study. Instead, I take my phone and scroll through Instagram. I click on the search bar and type '*sophia*'. The second person in the list of names has a profile picture that looks like her. *sophia.appleton.botticelli*. I click on follow.

The door opens and Colin walks in. 'Ever heard of knocking?'

'Ten minutes ago, you texted me: "I am bored. Help me."' He drops his books on my desk. 'You should study.' Colin sits on my bed next to my feet. 'That will only please my mother', I sigh and look at my hands. 'Ren', Colin says stern.

I look back at the ceiling. 'We'll make a deal', Colin begins and gets my attention. My nod indicates he can continue talking. 'You study for the rest of the day and go to your class. And we will throw a Halloween party.' I sit up and look at him, considering. 'With costumes?' Colin nods. 'With costumes.' 'Okay', I say and get up.

I take my books and start my laptop. Colin laughs and shakes his head. 'You better start planning that party, Peterson', I say with a big smile. I don't like a lot of people in the same area, but I do like a party. Especially when there are costumes.



Later that evening I walk past the food in the cafeteria. I'm not really hungry. I just take an apple and water. I turn around and bump into a girl with two blonde space buns. 'I'm sorry', I apologise. 'Oh, it's fine', she says and smiles a little.

'You're Renée?' she asks.

'Yes. Do I need to know you?'

'No, no. I'm Sophia's roommate, Elise.'

'Oh.' I look at my feet. 'She's ignoring me.'

'I know. That's why I was hoping to run into you - but not literally.' Elise chuckles and smiles friendly at me.

'So, what did I do wrong? I thought it was all fine, but apparently not.'

'You didn't do anything wrong. She's just embarrassed about something she said', Elise says.

'Then what did she say that she would be this embarrassed to talk to me?' I ask surprised.

'I knew she was exaggerating', Elise mumbles.

'She said something about taking you to Italy one day?' I nod. 'Yeah, well she's embarrassed about that because she thinks it gave the wrong signal.'

'Oh, I didn't think anything weird of that, I thought it was nice. I thought I made a friend', I say. Elise smiles softly.

'Why is she so upset about giving the wrong signals?' I frown.

'That's not for me to tell. Enjoy your sober diner.'

'Thanks.'

Elise walks away. I eat my apple and drink my water.

On my way back to my room I see Sophia walking a few meters in front of me. 'Sophia!' I say loud enough so she can hear me. She turns around but doesn't look at me. 'Are you okay?' I ask, worried.

'Yeah, yeah, of course I am', she says rubbing her arm nervously.

'Good, then you don't need to ignore me anymore.' I give her a crooked smile.

'Elise talked to you, didn't she?' I nod.

'I thought it was nice, your comment about taking me to Italy. I didn't think anything weird of it.'

'Oh, good.' Sophia sighs relieved and smiles.

We talk about little stuff we see on our way to my dorm. 'So, Colin and I want to throw a Halloween party next weekend.' Sophia looks at me. 'You are invited. And Elise too.'

'Really?' She asks surprised.

'Yes! And it's with costumes', I say, my smile getting bigger.

'Otherwise, it wouldn't be a Halloween party.' Sophia laughs.

'Where will this party be held?' Sophia asks after a while.

'Mine or Colin's house.'

'And how are we getting there?'

'The bus, taxi, my brother's car... it's only a half hour drive.'

'Then why are you living on campus?'

'To avoid my mother', I say coldly.

'Is she that impossible?' she asks.

'Yes.'

'My mother is the sweetest and nicest mother I could ever imagine', Sophia says after a while.

'Lucky you.'

Sophia hums and smiles. 'What about your father?'

'Oh, he's great but listens too much to my mother.'

'Good he's great', Sophia smiles.

There's a little silence. 'You said something about your brother?' 'Ah yes, Mathieu. I also have a sister Juliette, but I don't like her', I say and look at our feet that take the same steps. 'Do you have any siblings?'

'No, only child.'

'That must be nice', I say, looking at her.

'It's quiet.'

'Quiet is nice.'

'I guess, it can also be lonely and boring sometimes', she says thinking.

'My mother wouldn't let us have pets because she said there are too many children', I laugh sarcastically.

'Seriously?' Sophia sounds surprised.

'I am serious. I think my father would've let us.'

'I have a cat', Sophia says shyly.

'You do?!'

'Yes, her name's Molly. Do you want to see pictures?'

'You don't need to ask that! You should've shown them the day we met', I say and almost bump into someone with my enthusiasm. Sophia laughs and shows me some pictures.

Sophia tucks her brown hair behind her ear while she shows a funny video of Molly. Her eyes filled with the joy reliving the moment while watching. I notice her little freckles on her cheeks. 'That was it', she abruptly says and looks at me. I look immediately at the ground, cheek flushed. 'Well, she is adorable', I say and start walking again.

Not soon after we're walking up the stairs to my floor. 'You can go, you don't have to come all the way with me.'

'I don't mind.'

'You sure? You have to walk all the way back.'

Sophia nods. 'Elise is out with her other friends so I would be alone.'

'Gladys is always gone.'

'You don't like that?'

'Oh no, I do like that. I need my alone time sometimes', I say with a shy smile.

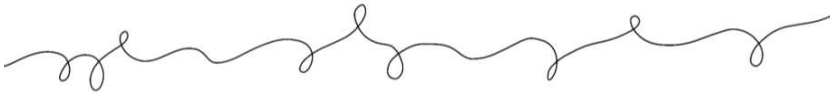
'An introvert?'

'Yep, the reason I have so little friends.' I unlock my door and walk into my room. Sophia hesitates but follows. 'Do you want a snack? I have a full box under my bed', I ask. 'A full box?' I go sit on my knees and take a box full of snacks from under my bed. 'You can have one, but you need to promise me that you won't tell Colin.' Sophia nods. 'I promise.'



‘What will you have?’ I ask opening the box. ‘Your least favourite snack.’ ‘Why would you want my least favourite snack?’ I ask confused, searching for the salted crisps. ‘So, you can have the one you like’, Sophia says with a little smile. I smile back. She is so nice and kind. ‘Here’, I say and toss her the salted crisps. ‘You don’t like salted crisps?!’ ‘No, they are too salty.’

Sophia continues to look at me surprised while she eats the crisps. ‘I like sour worms’, I say and take a bite from the candy. Sophia chuckles. ‘You’re weird’, she says with a smile. ‘Like being normal is fun’, I say and sit comfortably on my bed next to her. Trying to ignore the sad feeling her comment brought up. ‘No, it isn’t.’ Sophia says quietly.



Two hours later Sophia is getting tired. ‘I should go.’ She stands up. ‘Or you could stay?’ I ask shyly. Sophia looks at me, confused. ‘Gladys won’t return in like two days, so you can stay in her bed. I promise the sheets are clean.’ She thinks for a moment. ‘Okay’, she says. ‘Great!’ I am enthusiastic. ‘I’ll give you some pyjamas.’

I stand up and open my closet. ‘Stripes?’ I ask.

‘Everything is fine as long as I don’t look like a sailor from cartoons.’

‘Then no stripes’, I mumble and take a light-blue pair of trousers and a grey t-shirt. ‘It’ll probably be too big’, I say and give her the clothes.

‘Why would they be?’

‘Because I am not as skinny as you.’

She looks at me with a pained expression.

‘Don’t look at me like that. I’m fine with the way I look. It’s my mother who isn’t fine with it’, I say and look at my hands. Sophia stands up and gives me a hug. ‘I think you look beautiful in those