

What had Severus done, to deserve such stalwart loyalty?

“Come here,” the werewolf urged, voice cracking — heart breaking, much like Severus’, much like it always did on nights like this. Over and over again, an endless cycle, one the foolish wolf wouldn’t remove himself from no matter how often Severus begged him to leave, insisted he deserved better.

Severus was too tired to be that noble, right now. He collapsed into Remus’ waiting arms, shoulders shaking with silent sobs. Remus held him, cried with him, eased him up the stairs and out of his robes and into the bath. He didn’t judge Severus’ murderous hands; just held them lovingly, kissed his palms, murmured his devotion and his understanding and his assurances that he would always be there to pick up Severus’ shattered self. He didn’t promise it would never happen again. That was a promise none of them could make.

Seven months. Seven months until Harry turned seventeen, until it could finally be over, one way or another.

He could cope with seven more months of this.

As long as he had Remus, he could cope with far worse.

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T’was the night before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring — except Sirius, padding barefoot down the stairs in search of his wayward partner. Everyone had gone to bed; though with the strength of the Silencing charm on Harry’s room, Sirius knew better than to expect everyone was sleeping. He had gone up to shower, fully expecting his gorgeous boyfriend to be waiting on the bed for some antics behind a Silencing charm of their own, only to find their room empty.

Charlie had been quieter, lately. He was trying to hide it, but Sirius could tell.

He found the dragon tamer in the kitchen, a mug of tea cradled in his large hands. He looked up at Sirius’ entrance, face turning sheepish. “Hey. I was on my way up, I just...” He trailed off, shaking his head, smiling lopsidedly. “Never mind.”

Sirius snorted, glad they weren’t going to bother with the feeble excuses. He shuffled forward, perching on the edge of the table beside the shorter man, pressing their shoulders together. “Talk to me.”

Charlie sighed, his head tilting to lean against Sirius’. “I... when I lived in Romania, I knew I’d miss family Christmas most years. I was single, no kids — I was the natural choice to stay on the Reserve over the holidays. It didn’t bother me. But... I’m not in Romania any more. I can’t kid myself into thinking I’m missing family Christmas because I can’t get there — I wasn’t *invited*, my own bloody mother doesn’t *want* me there, I—“ He broke off, breath hitching, and Sirius’ whole chest ached for him. He turned, worming an arm around Charlie’s back, kissing his temple.

“I’m sorry, love. This is my fault—“