

wouldn't be long 'til they came after us. So I took the twins with me and ran away, to keep my parents safe. I went to Frankie's house — his big brother is his guardian, and he's never around anyway." From the scowl on the tall boy's face, Sirius figured he was Frankie. "Kevin found us about a month in, and we've stuck together ever since. We— thank you for saving us, sirs." She glanced back at Charlie and Fred, dark blue eyes wide with fear. "I don't know how much longer we would've lasted."

Sirius' heart broke for her — for all five of the kids, half-starved and terrified, having been on their own for months. It was a miracle they'd lasted this long, especially with the two little ones. He felt sick when he thought about how many other kids were in the same boat, stuck running for their lives with nowhere safe to go, no adults around to help them. Hopefully most of the muggleborns would have slipped into the muggle world, hiding in plain sight, keeping their magic tightly under wraps.

"How old are you?" he asked, and the girl smiled tightly.

"Thirteen, sir. Frankie and I are supposed to be third years now. Kevin would be in his second. The twins are only seven, but I know they've both got magic, I can tell." Her gaze dared him to argue, and Sirius held up his hands.

"I believe you," he assured. "Come on, let's get you fed and checked over by the healers, then we'll find rooms for you."

"We're staying together," Frankie insisted immediately, his hand reaching for the girl's. The boy in Charlie's arms squirmed to get down, and as soon as his feet hit the ground he was at his sister's side.

"We can do that," Charlie said, keeping his voice even — the kind of voice he used with startled dragons, or Sirius on Cold days. "There's rooms big enough to fit all five of you. It's fine." An amused flicker crossed his lips. "Just thought you might want a bit of space from the little ones, now you're somewhere safe. I have younger twin brothers, and they were a *nightmare* growing up," he conspired with a wink.

"Oi!" Fred yelped, offended. "You just didn't appreciate our enthusiasm, is all."

The girl in his arms giggled. "You're a twin?" she asked, voice filled with wonder. Fred beamed at her.

"Sure am! So identical even our own mum can't tell us apart," he said proudly.

"Amy, he's one of the Weasley twins," the older girl told her sister, a mischievous grin on her face that made Sirius' breath catch with its familiarity. The younger one gasped, her eyes going impossibly wider as she stared up at Fred.

"No way!"

"I see my reputation precedes me," Fred crowed in delight. "Tell you what — I'll ask my brother to come over tonight, and maybe he'll even be able to bring a few presents for you all. Did your big sister tell you we own a joke shop?"