

live them. Just like James and Lily had done, the first time round. Just like countless others had done.

“I know what you mean,” Charlie agreed. Of course he did — every member of his family, both blood and not, was going to be on that battlefield. Even Ron would be there, and he was a prick, but none of them wanted him to die for it.

“Sometimes I look at them, look at Harry, and I just think... I’d give my life for them, to make sure they’re okay. They’ve got so much more to offer this world than I have. If I die defending the people I love... it’ll be worth it.”

Suddenly, Charlie was moving — his big arms manhandled Sirius to the centre of the bed, and that bulky form was covering him, cocooning him in Charlie’s warmth and weight and the scent of leather. Sirius let out a quiet whimper, unable to help himself — he didn’t quite turn to brainless jelly beneath Charlie, not anymore, but it was still a close thing.

“You’d better not,” Charlie breathed, his lips brushing Sirius’ jaw, his forearms bracketing the animagus’ head. Sirius watched the flickering candlelight play over the bold black lines tattooed up Charlie’s shoulders, and wondered how the hell he got so lucky. “I’ve got plans for you, Sirius Black. Plans that involve spending the rest of forever with you. So don’t you go dying on me now, alright?”

Sirius let out a sound that wasn’t quite a cry but wasn’t a gasp either, bringing one hand up to stroke the Gryffindor lion tattooed on the right side of Charlie’s ribcage. It preened under his touch, shaking out its enormous mane. “I don’t want to,” he assured. “Gods, Charlie — I have plans for you, too, yeah? Plans for *us*.” Four years ago he never thought he’d have any plans at all past revenge on fucking *Pettigrew*, vengeance for Lily and James. “I don’t want to die. But if it’s me or Remus, me or Harry, me or *you*. Well. That’s an easy choice.”

Charlie growled lightly, the rumble vibrating through his chest straight into Sirius’. “Then I’ll just have to stay right by your side and make sure that’s not a choice you have to make,” he vowed, kissing the corner of Sirius’ mouth. He shuffled down a bit, resting his head on Sirius’ chest, reversing their earlier position. Like Sirius, his hand found the ink over a quick-beating heart. But in this case, it was an old tattoo, over a decade sat on Sirius’ skin — two canine paw prints beneath a proud nine-point rack of antlers, all set under a shining full moon.

Once upon a time, there had been a rat tail framing the whole thing, but now it was just a messy circle of scar tissue. In Azkaban, Sirius had dug the ink out with his own bare hands, hating the memory of that traitor on his skin.

“Tell me, about these plans,” Charlie urged, his body still half-pinning Sirius to the mattress, the perfect anchor. “We’ve never talked about... after.”

Neither of them had ever been brave enough.

“I want those kids,” Sirius admitted, staring up at the ceiling while his fingers traced lines between the freckles on Charlie’s upper back. “If we can. If they want us. I want to give those kids a home. I want *us* to have a home. And...” He trailed off, shaking his head. “It’s stupid.”